

A white megaphone with a teal handle and sound waves, set against a teal background.

# AMPLIFY!

## EXPERIENCES OF LIVED EXPERIENCE WORK

ENCOMPASS NETWORK  
AUGUST 2021



*"It's amazing reading all the feedback from people who have been to the exhibition. I am so glad it is being received as well as it is. Full credit to everyone involved who have given woman like me a voice after years of silence."*



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**We thank all the women whose voices, stories and experiences have informed this document.**

Thanks to Encompass Network members, Jan Macleod, Heather Williams, Anna Cook and Shannon McNee for insightful conversations, memory recall, proofing, lengthy discussions and to all those who have been a sounding board over the years.

As ever, the largest thanks go to the women who we have worked alongside over the years who told us how to talk to them and how they wanted their voices to be heard and used.

Your passion, bravery and creativity has driven much of the work and through it you have left your mark.

# CONTACTS

Women's Support Project: [www.womensupportproject.org.uk](http://www.womensupportproject.org.uk)  
[enquiries@womenssupportproject.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@womenssupportproject.org.uk)

Encompass: [www.encompassnetwork.info](http://www.encompassnetwork.info)  
[encompass@womenssupportproject.org.uk](mailto:encompass@womenssupportproject.org.uk)

CLiCK: [www.click.scot](http://www.click.scot)

Inside Outside: [www.insideoutsidescotland.info](http://www.insideoutsidescotland.info)



**CLiCK**



**OUTSIDE**

# CONTENTS

BACKGROUND	5
SUMMARY	6
WHY DID WE WANT TO PRODUCE THIS GUIDE?	11
WHAT IS LIVED EXPERIENCE?	12
VAWG & LIVED EXPERIENCE	13
WOMEN IN CSE - WHAT WORK HAS TAKEN PLACE?	15
WHOSE EXPERIENCES AND WHICH VOICES?	17
WHAT ARE THE CONSIDERATIONS, CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS?	20
WORK WITH WOMEN	26
LIVED EXPERIENCE THROUGH CLiCK	35
CONCLUSION	38
KATIE - EXPERIENCE OF BEING INVOLVED	39



# BACKGROUND

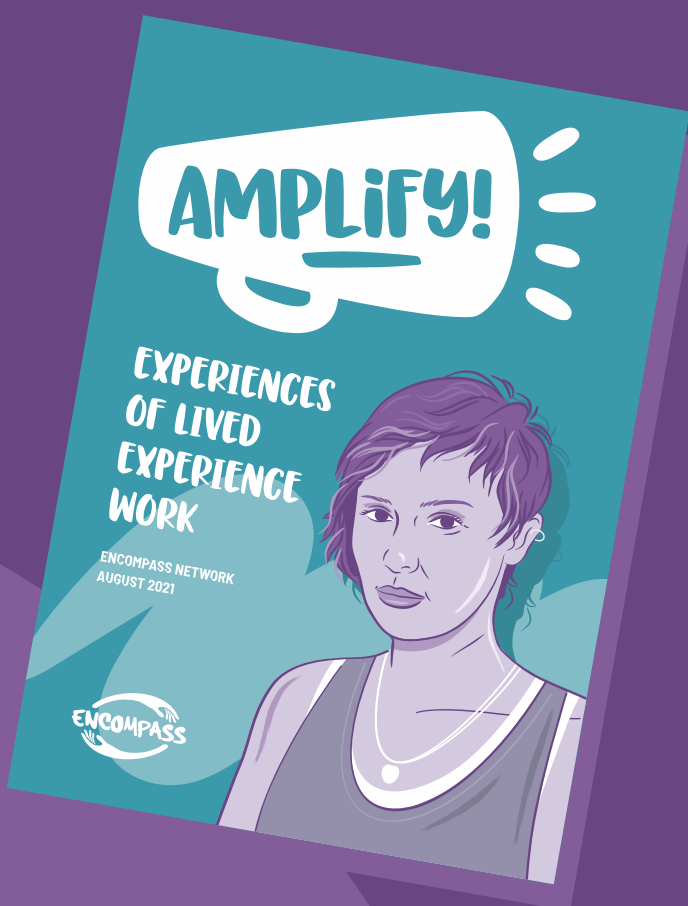
**This paper has been developed by The Women's Support Project, on behalf of the Encompass Network and CLiCK. The content is informed by women involved in selling or exchanging sex or who have left /exited, frontline staff, academic researchers and mainly through personal experience of working alongside women and hearing their views, their needs and their experiences.**

This booklet is not intended to be an academic document and nor does it claim to have developed a new approach based on different theoretical models. Those discussions are for other papers. Some of the work highlighted here has been described in various ways by others as action research, participatory research and transformative radical action. Views on those descriptions and theoretical approaches are also for other papers and settings.

This paper instead aims to capture the challenges and opportunities gathered over the past 10 years in linking with women involved in selling or exchanging sex and working alongside them through different projects with a common focus of finding out their experiences, their needs and their opinions. It has been a privilege to connect with women from across Scotland who are currently involved or who have moved on from selling sex. They are some of the strongest, most resilient and compassionate women I have ever met and their generosity of time and sharing their experiences has informed much understanding and developments.

Extensive work was carried out to understand women's experiences of violence against women, to hear their realities and from these develop approaches and services. Women's voices underpinned and informed the understanding, policies and strategies we have, and this work continues to this day.

Not everything that is covered in this paper will be applicable across all settings or with all women selling or exchanging sex, but it is based on some of the experiences of the Encompass Network and staff within these services. We recognise the limitations of this and make no claims to be experts on engaging with all women in every part of the sex industry in Scotland but share these reflections and learning to help inform practice going forward.



# SUMMARY

**Based on the engagement work undertaken, there are number of factors that should be considered before lived experience work starts.**

- Be clear on the principles underpinning the work such as valuing women and their knowledge, giving them control over the process and having a commitment to authenticity
- Recognise the power differential between women and researchers / engagement workers and the potential to skew women's words and views
- Be mindful of the terminology and language used and avoid using terms which not all women use or identify with
- Use multi levelled promotion, using as many approaches as possible including briefings, peer recruitment and word of mouth, social media, service recruitment, posters whilst recognising that some organisations and commercial sites may not share materials and information
- Recruitment should have an open criterion which does not exclude women who may have differing understandings as shown in CLiCK and Inside Outside where women shared different opinions on legislation
- Ensure that the variety of experiences and opinions are highlighted, – not just those that align with your own position and understanding
- The development and different phases of the project should be shared to support as much learning as possible

## WORK WITH WOMEN

All direct work with women should be at a pace led by the women and fit with their lives and circumstances. This may mean a lengthy time scale to accommodate changing needs and availability.

- Resources need to be allocated to allow for a flexible approach which may need extended time scales
- Some women need support to be able to be included such as translators, childcare and accessibility
- Women may need a wide support network in place in case any lived experience work triggers previous negative experiences and trauma
- Any participation should not cost the women and reimbursement should cover all expenses
- Projects should offer different levels of participation, so women have choices and options as to how they want to engage and can move through different levels if circumstances change
- There must be benefit and value to the women in taking part – gaining skills, knowledge, options or confidence as a result
- Women's identities must be protected to ensure safety and prevent exposure
- The work should be accepted as credible without the need for women to "out" themselves and careful consideration needs to be given to engagement with the media
- Women must be kept informed of where their voices, experiences and inputs have gone and any changes that may have happened as a result
- Women must retain ownership of the work and their contributions presented as authentically as possible

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## CO-ORDINATED

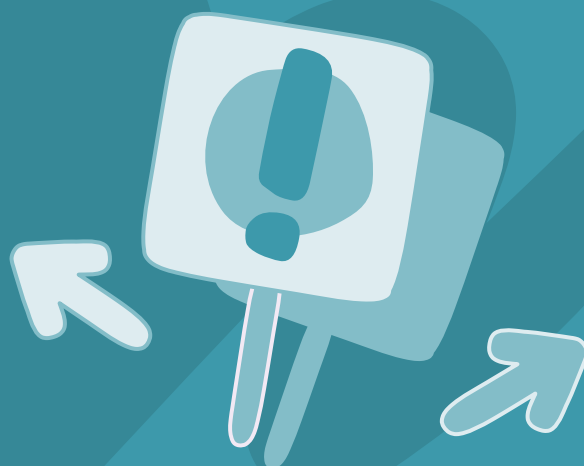
- More consideration needs to be given to the number of requests for the involvement and engagement of women with lived experience. Possibilities for co-ordination and co-operation should be explored, looking at the broad issues and specific questions to be included and developing a lived experience programme that meets several requirements. All of this must be delivered with the needs of women at the heart and the challenges that the most marginalised and disadvantaged face must be addressed

## CLARITY

- If there is any joint work between agencies, there has to be clarity around methods, roles, responsibilities and capacity. There needs to be clear agreements around what will happen with any information that is gained, who has rights to use that information and where original interviews, transcripts and data are held. We had hoped to commission some work with an organisation which is linked with women selling sex in order for them to input into the development and design of services. It became clear there would be no sharing of methodology, numbers, support needs of women or the findings. Such arrangements are not realistic in any joint working and unfortunately, this work was not commissioned and alternatives had to be sought
- There also needs to be clarity around what is expected of the women taking part and what being involved will entail. They need to know how and where their stories / words will be used and have the option to withdraw from aspects of that e.g., Levi from Inside Outside withdrew her consent for her images to be used in the exhibition for a period of time as she found it difficult to see the media attention around aspects of her story

## CONSIDERED

- The work should not be included as a last-minute addition or added to the end of any work. Women recognise when engagement work is tokenistic
- Womens' needs and challenges must be considered in planning with a recognition that many women involved in selling and exchanging sex have experienced different forms of violence and can come from backgrounds of constrained choice and limited options
- All work should have a point and purpose for the women to be involved – there is a difference between sitting with a woman in a support context and in a participation/ engagement session. Whilst we carried out recorded conversations, the women knew that there were broad topics we hoped we could cover and were able to get sight of these in planning stages and again before taking part in pre-recorded conversations. For some women the point of participating was to share their story, for some it was to inform other women and for others it was to call for changes to services and policies





## COMMUNICATION

- Women have advised us on different ideas and ways to engage with other women, all of which are time consuming and lengthy. Some organisations who may have large social media followings have in the past chosen not to share information. Women therefore are not able to make a choice about which lived experience projects they may want to participate in. Communication on such opportunities needs to be spread as widely as possible through national networks, VAWG partnerships and local forums. Women who are not tapped into specialist services may not find out about projects and so, other services and businesses should be involved
- Larger scale consultations are very often promoted through narrow channels, which the vast majority of women have no connection with or interest in. For some, they are informed of these consultations through lobbying and campaign groups. Any opportunities for involvement must be promoted through a broad range of sectors and organisations regardless of ideology and positions with a commitment towards ensuring women are aware of different options

## CREATIVE

- Women found it more beneficial and enjoyable when there were creative elements included in the work. All such opportunities should be explored in the design phase and throughout the project. We took the women's stories, artwork and photographs on tour around Scotland as part of an exhibition. This creative approach directly engaged with members of the public through events, training, and community engagement
- Throughout our work we always shared a strong vision of how their work could be. In Inside Outside, we told the women from the initial discussions that their outputs would be beautiful. This reassurance gave women the confidence and aspiration to believe in and push themselves
- Women enjoyed having a concrete "product" or outcome at the end of their work. For some, seeing their words turned into stories in a book, poems in a magazine, voices and quotes on pod casts, artwork on walls and photographs in brochures was hugely beneficial. It gave them a sense of pride at being included in high quality outputs and the importance of this cannot be minimised. One woman Natalia took her copy of Inside Outside home and showed her family. This was the first time in many years that they had talked about her involvement in street prostitution, and she said the beautiful high-quality book was the motivation in doing this, to open some discussions that she had wished had happened for many years. She reflected that it was unlikely that she would have done this if the Inside Outside book was a photocopy or computer printout. The thought and consideration that went into producing the final product made her feel valued and that her experience itself had value



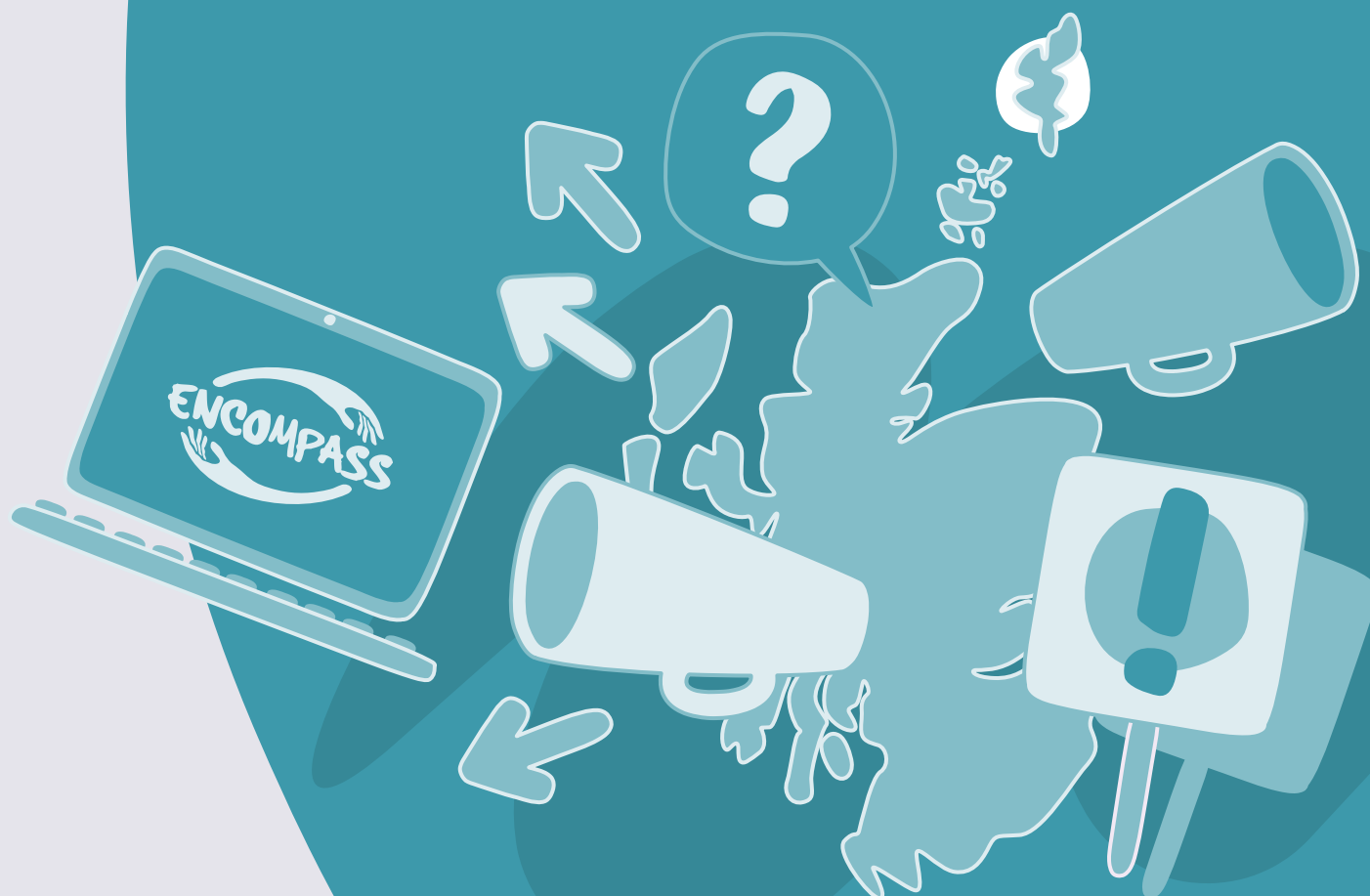


## CO-PRODUCED

- Wherever possible all elements of the work should be led and developed alongside women, giving them new skills through involvement in processes such as design, creative inputs, photography, blog writing, film making etc. If there is any promotional material about the work or resources linked to it – they should be included in co-producing those pieces and not just consulted at the end

## COMMITTED

- Longer term qualitative work to engage with women on their experiences requires flexibility, commitment and resources. A short time frame does not allow the women the chance to build up trusting relationships and feel safe enough to open up. In our experience, women may want to add, adapt and expand on aspects of their stories and views and the longer they have, the richer and more connected their participation is
- This work should be undertaken by staff who are well trained, knowledgeable about women's realities and connected to support organisations. It is difficult for external researchers to gain the trust of women to allow them to open up in a safe and honest way in the course of a one-hour interview



*"I would like to see more projects like this reaching more women and for them not to be scared of getting involved."*



# WHY DID WE WANT TO PRODUCE THIS GUIDE?

**The Covid 19 pandemic has been incredibly difficult for most people, with the huge changes we all faced in nearly every aspect of our lives. The virus has had and continues to have a significant detrimental impact on the lives of women who sell and exchange sex on street and in off street settings such as lap dancing bars, escort agencies, pornography, and selling images online.**

The women involved have faced the same challenges as many other women such as housing, no money, lack of access to services and caring responsibilities but are also facing additional challenges in accessing support due to stigma, fear of disclosing their specific circumstances and concerns around confidentiality.

We have linked with women throughout the pandemic to ensure their needs were articulated, highlighted and considered. There has been an increasing focus on the need to involve "lived experience" in developing approaches, strategic changes and service delivery as outlined below.

## KEY STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENTS

- The Scottish Government (SG) programme for 19/20 committed to explore what was needed to address prostitution in Scotland and to consult on approaches to challenge men's demand for prostitution, continue to support work to reduce the harms associated with commercial sexual exploitation and help women to exit.

An event was held to engage with the key stakeholders in Nov 2020 to look at how women could be supported to engage with the consultation process. At the time of writing (June 2021) the Scottish Government is due to report, but it is expected that a programme of work will be developed through which the voices and experiences of women will be included

- COSLA's leaders identified women engaged in Commercial Sexual Exploitation (CSE) including prostitution as a priority for support, given their heightened vulnerabilities in the context of the pandemic. COSLA group leaders instructed their officers to pull together a short-term working group to look at the diverse needs of women with a key theme identified the need for an informed/co-designed approach – ensuring women with experience are at the heart of this work. It will be developing over the next year and longer
- The next round of Delivering Equally Safe funding is due to be announced at the end of July 2020 and CSE has been identified as a priority theme. There is a commitment to include women with lived experience as part of the assessment process and discussions were had with Inspiring Scotland around the particular barrier's women in CSE can face taking part in such processes
- Through the Delivering Equally Safe Fund it is hoped that a range of work will be developing including new partnerships, pilot projects and expanded services, all of which should be based on women's needs and experiences. These can only be informed by direct engagement with women across the spectrum of CSE. They must be at the core of any work moving forward

# WHAT IS LIVED EXPERIENCE?

**It is important to consider what is meant by the term lived experience as the term has become so broad to be virtually meaningless.**

"Lived experience" work has been a term used to refer to:

- completing online surveys
- answering questionnaires
- taking part in qualitative research
- sitting on reference panels or steering groups
- assessing funding applications and being part of recruitment procedures
- Being part of focus groups
- Completing feedback forms

It appears that the term can be used to describe any way in which women who have experienced a form of violence is asked something relating to her experience and her opinions and views on services.

In no way do we want to undermine or devalue the work taking place and the importance of it but rather pose a question - is there a risk that the term has become so broad that it is has lost meaning and a common understanding?

## DEFINITIONS

- Personal knowledge about the world gained through direct, first-hand involvement in everyday events rather than through representations constructed by other people. It may also refer to knowledge of people gained from direct face-to-face interaction rather than through a technological medium
- **Lived experience**, as it is explored and understood in qualitative research, is a representation and understanding of a researcher or research subject's human **experiences**, choices, and options and how those factors influence one's perception of knowledge

**Our definition is building relationships with women to create safe spaces and opportunities for them to engage in beneficial and creative ways for their experiences, opinions and needs to be expressed and listened to.**

This paper will share experiences across a range of tools with a focus on qualitative approaches.

We know that capturing "lived experience" can inform sharp critique of services and approaches, offering innovative windows and insights into the realities of women. It has a real purpose and places value on hearing women's experiences and opinions to support understanding. Giving women opportunities to participate gives depth of understanding behind inequalities and highlight disadvantages, rather than simply documenting these as abstract processes. As Stack (1997) points out documenting 'the social practices and everyday lives of people most deeply affected' by policies can cast some light on the forces behind the immediate or seemingly self-evident 'givens' of policy-related interactions (pg191).

"Lived experience" research or participation can recognise feelings, interactions and identities that can be ignored or not captured in other research or methods. In depth longer term lived experience research can make connections, show empathy and respect for women.

# VAWG & LIVED EXPERIENCE

**This growing focus on “lived experience” and the importance of including women who have experienced VAWG in consultations, engaging with and researching their experiences is not a result of the pandemic but has been growing in recent years.**

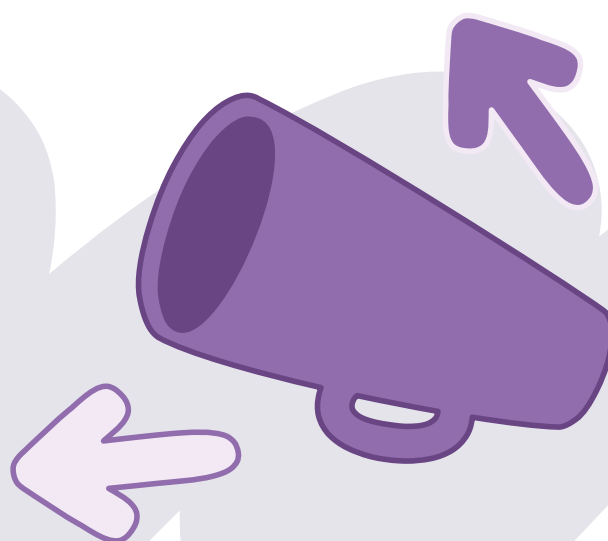
Some excellent work has already been carried out with women and children affected by VAWG such as:

- The Everyday Heroes project<sup>1</sup>
- Recounting Women<sup>2</sup>
- The consultation carried out by Wise Women with survivors of VAWG on the Equally Safe strategy “The Scottish Government Equally Safe Strategy Consultation with Survivors of Gender based violence”<sup>3</sup>
- In 2019 Rape Crisis Scotland set up a Survivors Reference Group with those who have engaged with the Scottish Justice System at any level<sup>4</sup>

As part of the Equally Safe Delivery Plan, The Scottish Government committed to implement refreshed governance arrangements including scaling up participation. A new Experience Expert Panel (EEP) was set up to build “on the learning from our pilot participation projects to ensure that women, children and young people who have lived experience of gender-based violence shape and influence the implementation of this Plan.”<sup>5</sup>

There were no pilot participation projects focusing or targeting engagement with women selling and exchanging sex, despite this being raised throughout the process. Women in CSE have not been included and the particular barriers for inclusion have not been considered or addressed. A larger scale project was being developed looking at the needs of women affected by VAWG, but CSE was not included in the commissioning documents or process and ultimately the women's specific needs were not raised or included in the final report.

The Experience Expert panel changed to an Expert by Experience group (EEPG) comprised of services, organisations and researchers looking at sharing promising work and good practice. There was opportunity to showcase The Inside Outside project (which will be highlighted in later sections). The EEP group had not agreed a work plan and did not meet during the pandemic.



1. <https://womensaid.scot/project/everyday-heroes/>

2. <https://womensaid.scot/project/recounting-women>

3. <https://www.wisewomen.org.uk/>

4. <https://www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk/resources/SG--First-Meeting-FINAL-info-breakdown-web-version.pdf>

5. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/equally-safe-delivery-plan-scotlands-strategy-prevent-violence-against-women/pages/5/>

## RESEARCH AGENDA

During 2020, The Scottish Government Justice Analytical services included the needs of women selling / exchanging sex in its Covid 19 and VAWG reports.<sup>6</sup>

A number of other research projects were started during 2021, looking at the needs of people due to the pandemic. It was excellent to see a recognition of the need to include women in CSE in some of these such as the research managed by the Inclusion Health Group, established by Public Health Scotland. This ongoing research wanted to “understand the lived experience of marginalised communities and collaborating to use this evidence from experience to influence our respective stakeholders.”

## INCLUSION AND CONSIDERATION OF CSE IN ALL CONSULTATIONS

With potential strategic, legal and policy developments ahead, further research and consultations on services, it is important that all this work understands and considers the need to ensure that women in CSE are included given many of them experience other forms of VAWG. If there is a consultation on Domestic Abuse, this will include women who are also experiencing CSE but haven't disclosed as yet and so, the potential additional barriers they face for inclusion need addressed. If work is happening with women around sexual violence, consideration needs to be given as to how CSE is reflected within the themes or questions.

There needs to be a more robust approach to ensuring that women in CSE are included and given a space in the wider VAWG agenda.



---

6. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-domestic-abuse-forms-violence-against-women-girls-during-phase-3-scotlands-route-map-11-august-11-october/pages/13/>



# WOMEN IN CSE - WHAT WORK HAS TAKEN PLACE?

**As mentioned earlier, linking with and hearing from women in CSE has been a core part of the Encompass Network services and only some of the work carried out in the past can be covered here.**

## SERVICE DESIGN, DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGES

Encompass services carry out consultations on a regular basis with service users on how they have found the service, what more would they like etc with this information used to make changes to service design or delivery such as changing opening hours, introducing new developments or changing promotional materials.

## CONSULTATIONS

- In the mid-2000's a large event was held over a day for women involved in CSE in Glasgow, with facilitated workshops on a range of issues including confidence and personal safety. The ethos of the day was to value the women and their experiences and make it as accessible as possible with transport, childcare and catering provided. It was organised by a multi-agency group of services and women's organisations. Underlying everything on the day was creative ways to consult and capture the realities of women's lives and their resulting needs
- In 2016, Tara worked with Wise Women in Glasgow to run a consultation project on the Scottish Human Trafficking strategy with the women they work with who had experience of most forms of exploitation associated with human trafficking including commercial sexual exploitation, labour and domestic servitude. To ensure full participation, interpreters and a crèche was provided along with catering and travel expenses. In the morning, the event focussed on confidence building exercises with the women to support them as a group to work together and increase their participation during the afternoon sessions and supported women to identify the skills and qualities they required to survive trafficking: Collected Works Ltd completed a graphic recording of the session on the strategy
- Encompass Services have linked with women on previous Scottish Government consultations and supported them to make individual submissions, used their inputs to inform our consultations and connected them with other agencies who were running consultations
- Services have also facilitated meetings with local elected representatives and MSPs to inform their understanding of the realities of women's lives





## RESEARCH PROJECTS

Encompass Services receive a high number of requests to “find” women for research projects, ranging from undergraduate projects across disciplines to PhDs to larger scale funded academic work. Women are informed of these but few want to take up the option. If they do, support workers will be the link and work with the woman/ women to participate but this can take a lot of time to arrange. We receive requests for such things as finding out women's views on asymmetrical carceral interventions or what their opinion is on theories such as Foucault and how it applies to their situations. Most of the women Encompass works with have little interest in such questions and see little relevance to their lives.



# WHOSE EXPERIENCES AND WHICH VOICES?

**Throughout the past 10 years there has been a growing momentum calling for only those who are selling or exchanging sex to have a voice in policy and strategic discussions.**

The parameters around this were shown quite overtly in 2015:

*"It is time to move away from policy debates that exclude those most affected and instead let people currently selling sex lead the conversation. I have in formulating these proposals listened to them above all."*

*– Page 3 of Prostitution Law Reform proposal 2015*

We think it is important to reflect upon this when considering the inclusion of women's experiences and opinions in lived experience work, just whose voice counts?

Women involved in selling and exchanging sex are not a homogenous group, they are involved in different forms, in different settings and at different times. Women enter for a number of reasons, move through and into different aspects with some women exiting and then returning. Some women are living with domestic abuse, come from backgrounds of disadvantage and discrimination, some women have long term health conditions or disabilities, other women are migrants or come from minority groups.

Some women are college students, others have PhDs, and some are involved whilst having other forms of work. Some women refuse direct sexual penetration, others sell images whilst some have little or no choice about whom they have sex with or what kind of sex they will have to have.

With this diversity in mind, there is a huge variety of experiences under umbrella terms such as sex worker or women involved in selling or exchanging sex. When you speak to a woman, she can only share her own experience up to that point which is incredibly important in informing understanding, but it is a potentially narrow sphere. The statement that those currently selling sex should lead the debate is problematic, sets very tight parameters around who can and should be engaged in this debate, and potentially serves to silence those who were previously involved.

## REPRESENTATION

No one service or agency can claim that they represent the experiences of all women involved in selling or exchanging sex. Women who sell or exchange sex, including images, are an incredibly diverse group with diverse needs and no one service or community-based work engages with all women. Many women do not access services through which participation, research and consultation opportunities are channelled and so their voices and experiences are not presented or included.

Engaging with women gives an insight into experiences and opinions but it must be acknowledged that women are exposed to different levels of information, campaigns / campaign materials, activism and movements. There is not necessarily parity in terms of access.

*"The women I support who are very vulnerable, very chaotic – they don't have a voice in policy or decision making or government. It's hard for them to engage with that because policy, and law – high up things – are things that happen to them. They're not involved in the decision-making process which we obviously recognise as wrong. Their voices, and their thoughts, and their experiences are essential to the services we deliver so they should be essential to decision making higher up as well. It is hard for women to engage with research or consultations when they're busy surviving. It's about us being able to give women the space and incentivise their involvement, and emphasise to them that their voice is important."*

*– Click Magazine*

Most women that Encompass services support are not engaged in campaigns and lobbying or online activism. Encompass is a network of frontline services, and the role of staff is to empower and support women, not encourage them to sign petitions or campaign letters but instead look to find safe ways for their voices to be shared and included.

Our approach during Inside Outside was criticised, and accusations of exclusion levied. We responded to this in the Inside Outside blog:

*"We know there have been criticisms of what we have done – why are 'sex workers' not included, why did we not talk to women who already speak out, why did we not speak to women who love what they do in the sex industry, why did we not link with lobbying groups to allow their women to be included. There are long answers to each of those points and too long for this post. The short answer is that we wanted to speak to women who didn't have huge twitter followings, who don't keep blogs about being involved, who don't do media interviews, who aren't activists, who aren't linked with lobbying organisations. Women who haven't had a platform and who felt ignored were our priority. We make no apology for that."*

*– Inside Outside blog*



## INCLUSION OF SURVIVORS

Limiting conversations to those currently involved in selling or exchanging sex services serves to silence women who have exited/ are survivors. In no other area of VAWG would we say that only those currently living with and experiencing it are qualified to lead or be included in public debate on that issue. On the contrary good practice across a range of services acknowledges the limitations and potential harms of involving those currently living with violence or abuse in public debate.

Women who have moved on or exited must be at the forefront of discussions. They are in a unique position of entering, being actively involved in selling sex and having gone through the processes of exiting. Only survivors have direct lived experience of all of that.

In common with other forms of VAWG, women who have left say their views of what they had experienced changed when they were out and looked back in. In focusing on those currently involved, those perspectives are lost. During Inside Outside and Outside women were asked why they wanted to take part, many of them said they wanted things to be better / different for other women. By saying only those currently involved should lead means that survivors would not be given the chance to be involved in high level strategic discussions which could benefit other women both involved and exiting.

## INCLUSION OF WORKERS

We of course support the dominance of learning from women with direct lived experience, but we also think that there is real value in listening to the experiences of staff, which some call specialist by experience.

Very often staff have worked with women over a period of years and can see the changes that take place with differing needs over that time.

These observations and perspectives are important in understanding what services need to consider and are incredibly important in understanding the realities for some women. Staff have worked long enough to see patterns and similar dynamics arise for women and can use this knowledge to track trends and to understand what women may need next.

One specialist worker commented that over the years she has seen a similar pattern emerge where many women who are open about being involved tend to start to experience more difficulties after about six months. This insight was included in many of the stories shared by women through Inside Outside and Outside, as well as in other contexts.

Staff have also said that it can take a very long time to build a relationship with women until she is comfortable to disclose what has been happening for her. This is echoed by Levi who spoke about the need to wear a mask whilst she was involved:

*"I think I was putting mask on to make other people think, "Eh look she's fine she's looking fine she's doing good." But inside I really wasnae fine. Far fae fine. Crumbling Underneath."*  
– Inside Outside

The voices and experiences of staff need to be considered and included.

As with all forms of VAWG, survivors are involved in service delivery as volunteers or staff. There should not be an expectation that any woman must disclose current involvement to be allowed a voice or deemed credible.

The full range of experiences and needs should be included as all have valuable perspective and experiences which we can learn from.

# WHAT ARE THE CONSIDERATIONS, CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS?

**This section shares some of the learning and insights which we hope may inform discussions and practice over the coming months.**

## 1/ PRINCIPLES

- All work needs to be underpinned with an ethical approach

In Inside Outside, we developed information sheets, consent forms with advice from academics and researchers to ensure that whilst we were not applying for ethical approval, the work would meet high ethical standards.

Our underlying approach was based on the concepts of Choice, Consent and Control

### CHOICE

We wanted to ensure that the women were fully informed about the project, the background to it, why it was taking place and possible consequences from taking part. The potential for being outed, being criticised and disbelieved both now and in the future were discussed so each woman could decide.

One woman joked that we were trying to put her off taking part, but we wanted to ensure that the positive and negative aspects were outlined and so a woman could make an informed choice.

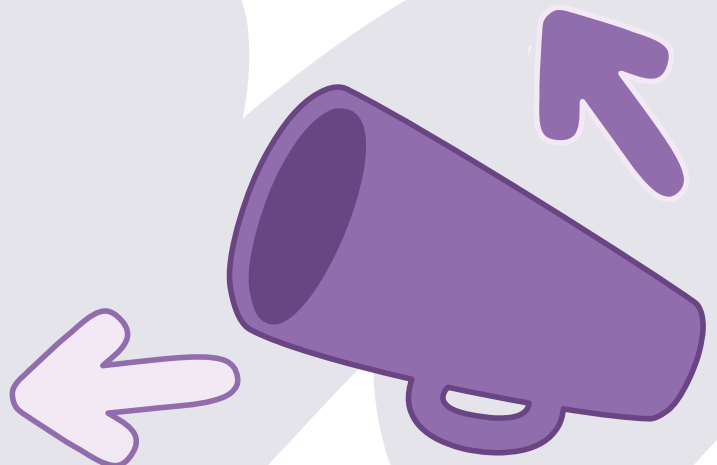
Women also were given choice in each element of the project – choosing to take part, choosing to meet, choosing to engage in a conversation, choosing whether it could be recorded or transcribed, choosing her words and what photographs she wanted to share.

### CONSENT

The women's consent was sought throughout the project – at every stage including:

- consent to contact her
- consent to take part in a conversion
- consent for it being recorded
- consent for recording to be sent to transcriber
- consent for it to be shared

One woman exercised this when she withdrew her consent for her story to be included in the book and shared online. This was the night before the exhibition and book were to be launched and so her chapter had to be manually ripped out from the book. All references to her on the blog and materials were removed. Her consent had to be respected and upheld.



## CONTROL

The women had to feel in control during recorded sessions, control over answering questions, whether to keep going or take a break. They also had control over the content – they could choose what to keep for themselves and what to share with others. They also had control of their identity – with features or facts that may put them removed and the women cut a lot from their final stories, preferring to keep them private and for themselves.

## 2/ ACKNOWLEDGE POWER DIFFERENTIAL AND POTENTIAL TO SKEW WOMEN'S WORDS AND VIEWS

Many women have experienced different forms of violence and abuse in their lives, including domestic abuse. Many of them have been in situations where power was being taken from them – boyfriends acting as pimps and pressurising them to sell sex, agencies advertising that they offer different sexual services than women agree to or men pushing boundaries for different forms of sex. Women also experience high levels of sexual harassment and violence from threats to out / dox, stalking, punters/ clients ignoring boundaries, removing condoms, and rape.

When planning lived experience work, we have to be very aware of how power has been abused for the women and so, be very aware of how this may impact on their participation. Some women may try to read the situation, second guess what they think you will want to hear and give the responses she anticipates you want to hear.

For a lot of women there has been conditions attached to relationships and as Katie says:

*“You’re all there to make money. That is it. If you make a friend, that’s a plus side. But you’re not there to make friends. You just go, do your job and you leave. That’s it. You get to work with some of them, if say, a customer wants two girls, you would get to meet whoever else they picked but what I would say in that business, there are no friends in it.”*

– Inside Outside

Careful questioning and subtle reflecting back to the women is important to ensure what they have said is coming from their views and experiences and not a reflection of what you want or what they have been told to say.

Large scale social media campaigns linked to consultations run the risk of women repeating information without fully understanding the background and wider context. Women have shared with us that they responded to research and questionnaires, giving answers based on briefings and information that they did not fully understand at that time but were encouraged to do so.

We have preferred to focus resources on engaging in longer term developmental approaches with smaller numbers of individual women. In Inside Outside, women had the freedom to say whatever they wanted, take conversations in the directions they wanted and bring whatever they felt was important to the fore. Discussions around ideology were neither relevant nor included – those sessions were focused on her experiences and opinions based on those. Women gave clear ideas on service development, role of staff, links with a variety of agencies, experiences of criminal justice and accessing support. These were placed in the context of her life story and journey, using her own words without external analysis. We wanted their voices to be authentic.



## 3/ TERMINOLOGY AND LANGUAGE

Given how contested and divisive the issue of CSE is in Scotland, it is very important to consider the terminology and language used in promotion, information sheets and consent forms etc. Some women who sell or exchange sex will call themselves sex workers whereas other women completely reject that term. In Inside Outside all women were asked how they would describe themselves and what would they have liked to be called whilst involved. None of the women said they were or called themselves sex workers.

I asked Levi what she would call herself and she did not identify with any of the terms such as working girl, street worker, prostitute or sex worker. She had never heard the term sex worker before and wanted to know where this was being said and who called themselves that.

Natalia had a similar reaction and said:

*"Who says that? I was never a sex worker, I wouldnae ever call myself that. It's no a job. It was just a way of making money but it wasne easy and it wasne a job."*

– Inside Outside

It is better to use a neutral term such as "involved in selling or exchanging sex" as this describes what the women do as opposed to selecting only a section who relate to the term sex worker.

We work with women in other contexts who called themselves sex workers and who were involved in sex worker activism. Our work has been open to all and despite regular assertions that exiting is a condition of being involved with Encompass services, this has never been the case.

## 4/ PROMOTION - WHERE TO ADVERTISE (AND WHO WON'T SHARE IT!)

In order to have a real range of voices, experiences and opinions covered in any work – clear consideration needs to be given to how women will find out about this in the first place.

When consultations are taking place that have a focus on CSE, the focus very often turns to specialist agencies as the main routes. Women who are involved in selling and exchanging sex access a range of services, including other VAWG services and these are also ideal settings for consultation work to take place around CSE. It is acknowledged that women are not necessarily disclosing their involvement but equally services do not routinely ask in order to better understand or support women.

If we think about spaces where women are – offline and online, a wider recruitment approach is needed but there can be challenges associated with this too

A working group was pulled together to promote specialist sexual services for women in CSE. We linked with women who advised us to put adverts on commercial sites which host adverts and profiles selling sex as that was where women would see them when checking in on their profiles. A series of adverts were developed, tested and placed on sites such as Adultwork but they were quickly removed by a site moderator as the Health Board held a VAWG approach. This is a huge hurdle to overcome. The sites are set up to hold adverts, profiles and make profit and so can restrict access however, this means a route of promotion and engagement is closed.

A similar situation arose during Covid when attempts were made to link with adult sites / platforms and escort agencies to ask if they would share information on services and emergency funds. Of the 32 contacted only 3 responded and 2 shared information with women.



Social media has been used with promotional flyers on projects designed and shared across services. Twitter, Facebook and Instagram has been used to promote surveys and polls etc. CLiCK made extensive use of social media to engage women but other organisations and services did not retweet to their followers which limited the scope of promotion. This will remain an issue and challenge for any VAWG related consultations and projects.

## 5/ RECRUITMENT

It has been interesting to look at the range of services women who have been involved in engagement projects found out about it including:

- Encompass Services such as CLiCK
- Front-line services such as sexual health and addiction services

Women were informed of opportunities to take part and if they wanted to and needed support to do so – it was facilitated through their support workers or case workers. This included arranging meetings, support workers attending initial meetings and being kept informed of the process, if the woman consented.

A number of women became involved in projects after hearing about the work of The Women's Support Project at events or conferences. These women with lived experience were working in various sectors and wanted the chance for their experiences to be told and shared, to join in projects and have similar opportunities.

Other women became involved after seeing media reports and social media discussions. All women had a link to a support service in place before any longer-term qualitative work was undertaken to ensure that should it be needed; it was already in place.

The Women's Support Project was accused of cherry-picking women and only selecting those with difficult or negative experiences of selling or exchanging sex. This was not the case. Women self-selected and the only criteria was that they wanted to be involved and had been involved in some element of the sex industry.

During Inside Outside, only minimal details of a woman's history or current circumstances were shared with the worker carrying out the recorded conversations, so she did not select women to ensure negativity or only highlight very dark experiences.

As was quoted on the Inside Outside blog:

*"We stress to people that we did not cherry pick women and select only those with difficult stories. We didn't know what women were bringing to the table and digital recorder, we didn't censor them or only allow those who had negative experiences. We asked women what the good points were, to tell us about the good punters, to tell us what they gained being inside the sex industry. They chose what to tell and what to share. If they struggled to think of the good, of the benefits and the positives, then that was because that was their experiences. To suggest otherwise is to silence them."*



## 6/ PRESENTATION OF ALL VIEWS – NOT JUST THOSE THAT ALIGN WITH OWN POSITION

In any lived experience work, there will be a range of backgrounds, contexts and abilities to shape and share countering voices and opinions. Therefore, we presented women's words, not our analysis of them. There were instances where we had to fact check with women as some of what they were saying was factually inaccurate and we didn't want them or the work to be threatened or undermined.

We did not develop campaigns and share template letters for women to complete and share in response to consultations. We linked with women who disclosed they had previously signed and sent circular campaign emails but hadn't really understood what it was about or what was being referred to. It is important to consider the information / briefings that accompany such templates and emails to ensure women have all in the information with which to have an informed opinion and make an informed choice in how to respond.

We have taken the approach that smaller scale more qualitative longer term work is of more benefit to women and allows them to place their opinions into a much wider context and so give greater understanding.

Some women experienced conflict on hearing other women's opinions which are contrary to their own beliefs and experiences. An example is when a young woman who had recently started selling sex read the story of another woman who had exited and spoke about her negative experiences. The younger woman initially struggled to believe that this could have happened as she had not personally experienced such things or felt that way to date. Another was when a woman who had been abducted and raped read the story of another who said she was empowered through lap dancing and selling images.

With a range of experiences and voices coming through in lived experience, all should be given a place with no more value placed on those which only align with a certain viewpoint.

## 7/ OPENNESS AND SHARING

Very often the learning and results of research will be shared at the end of a project, when the process is over often taking 2 or 3 years. During that time the wider context and environment for women could have changed and results can be dated or no longer be as relevant.

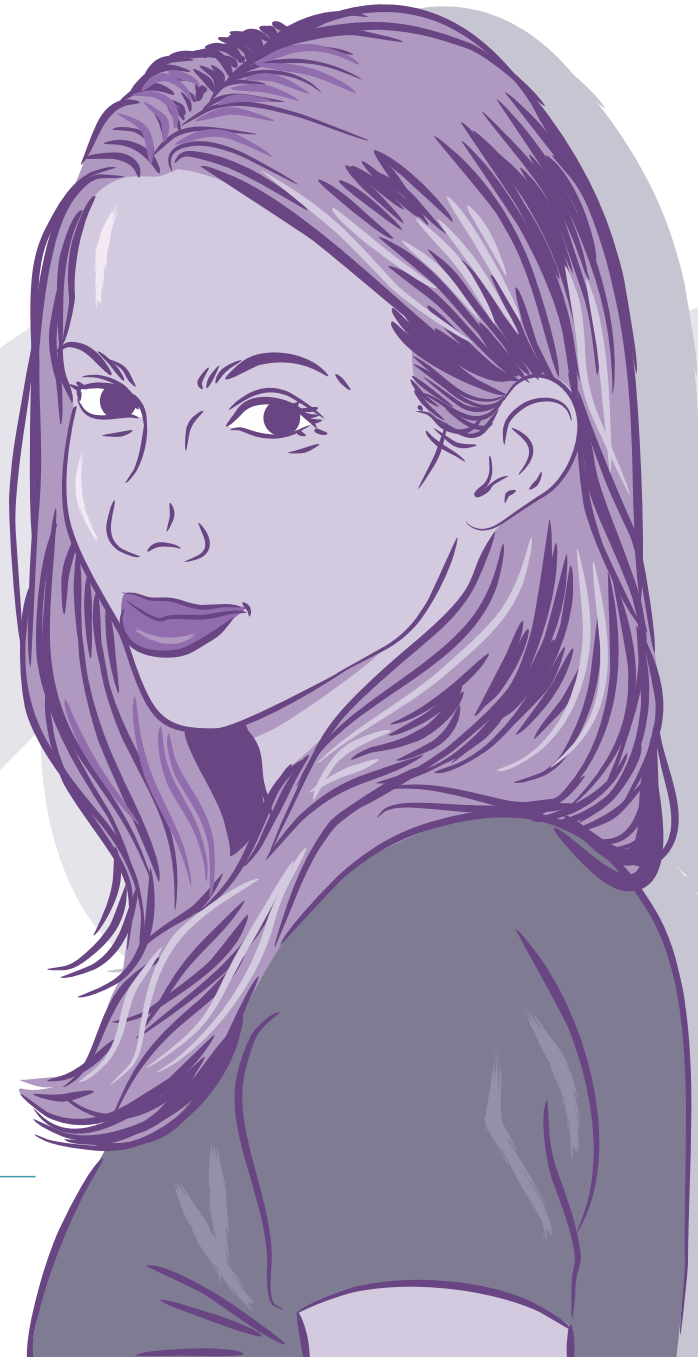
With Inside Outside we felt it was important to share the journey of the project as it was to be open and transparent about what we were doing and learning as part of the pilot. We knew others were considering their own pieces of work and we felt that valuable learning and reflections could be shared to help support and inform other work. We wanted to be open and transparent about what we were piloting and not appear as passive voices in a formal report at the end.

The blog has also served as a record of the work, the steps taken, and it shows the ideas and the work growing and developing, influenced by the women. Very often it is details and observations throughout a piece of work that offer rich learning beyond a research methodology and the blog allowed for some of those to be documented and recorded in a fluid and spontaneous way.

We encouraged many people linked with the work to write blogs about their experiences of being involved with the work including the transcriber of recorded conversations, the designer, co-organisers, VAWG Co-ordinators, exhibition attendees, curators/ volunteers, and the women themselves.

The blog was moderated by WSP staff, and all comments went through a checking process before being shared. A few comments which were inflammatory or derogatory to the women were not published as it was important that the women were not exposed to this negativity.

The women themselves followed the blog and were proud of what it was doing, adding to their sense of ownership. It was not an expectation that women themselves would contribute as bloggers, but some women wanted to be part of it too and wrote anonymous blogs throughout the project, to share what the impact of taking part had been, how it felt to see their work being exhibited and attending launches. This helped the readers engage with the women as individuals, their work and the issues as they had a sense of “real” women in the project and their emerging work.<sup>7</sup>



---

7. <https://insideoutsidescotland.wordpress.com/2017/10/26/my-voice/>

# WORK WITH WOMEN

**Women have always been at the heart of the work of The Women's Support Project and Encompass Services, including CLiCK. We have engaged with women through surveys, polls, questionnaires, focus / small groups, workshops, webinars, online chat, photo projects and recorded conversations. Based on all of this, we would like to share some of our reflections on working directly with women.**

## WOMEN LED

Women lead complex, diverse, rich busy lives which are very often in flux and change. Understandably at times, being involved in projects falls down their priorities with other things becoming more important. The targets and time scales set for a project rightly matter little to women when they are dealing with unexpected bereavement, changes in child contact, illnesses, changing scripts, relapse, moving home, changing jobs. All of these impact on a women's availability and opportunities to take part and complete projects.

During the "Outside" project, the deadline and end point for recorded conversations was changed. One woman had expressed interest and we had linked with her for over a year, discussing all that "Outside" would entail and building up a trusting relationship. When she was told of a new deadline, she was still keen to be able to take part and so, it was arranged that that option would remain.

Circumstances changed in her personal life, and she changed her mind, saying that this was not the right time for her. She had to be able to say no and draw a boundary around her priorities, her time and her commitment. This was a positive thing where she felt respected and, in enough control, to be able to say no to doing something in order to fit in with another person's timetable and needs. We left the door open for her and put other opportunities in place so she was able to participate at a time in the future which was right for her.

## RESOURCES AND TIMESCALES

Longer term intensive qualitative work takes time and can end up lengthy if we are to ensure that women are ready to take part.

We know that all work is time bound either to meet publishing deadlines, design deadlines or funding deadlines but to really engage with women, it can take 3 times as long as planned. The actual time to build relationships and understanding with the women can take long periods therefore time scales and deadlines need to be realistic to reflect women's needs if a project is to say it is women led. It has to be at their pace which may mean long delays at times and slowly reducing numbers.



We have been contacted by researchers requesting support to access women involved in prostitution as part of a research study, very often with a short time frame. There seems to be little consideration given to the reality of many women's lives and other demands. The idea that a group of women could be identified, be fully informed of the project and have considered potential consequences and therefore able to make an informed choice to participate is unrealistic.

The idea that women will feel safe, secure and comfortable enough to open up and disclose their realities in the space of a one-hour interview is unrealistic.

## SUPPORT FOR INCLUSION

Very often women need additional support to get around obstacles to participating such as child-care / care considerations, money for travel, time away from making money, commitments to escort agencies, medical and health conditions, literacy issues, English is not a first language, and lack of digital access including access to Wi-Fi. Many women also need support and confidence built to participate, with some highlighting that the language and concepts can be challenging with a lot of background knowledge and information needed.

On top of this many women have very low self-esteem and confidence and it can take a long time to build trust to open up and talk about their experiences. Women can need a lot of support to feel comfortable and safe enough to take part and this level of support may be needed throughout the process.

All of these need to be considered when planning participation and engagement or else the same women will be consulted with time and time again.

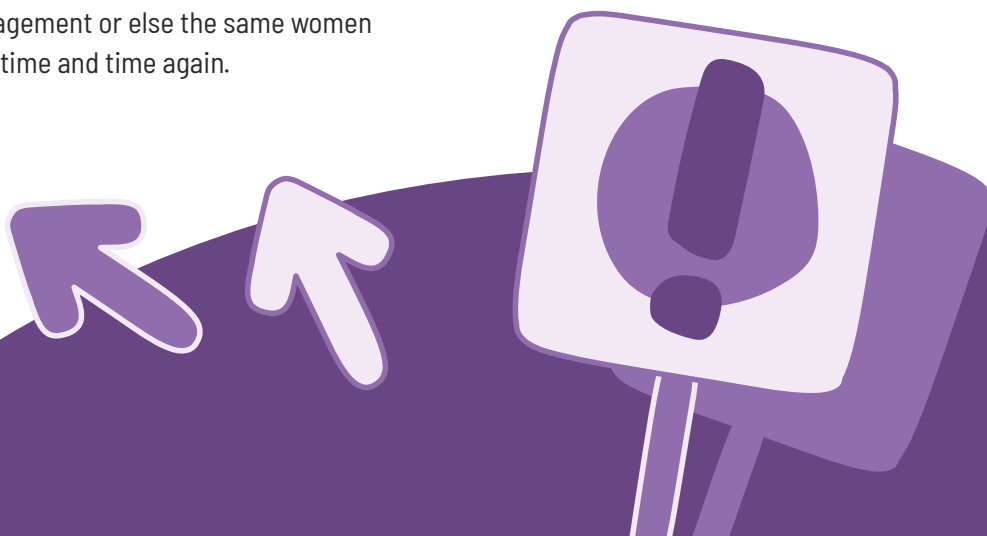
## SUPPORT OPTIONS AND NETWORKS

For some women, they found talking about aspects of their lives hard. Whilst women were fully informed and briefed about whatever piece of work they were going to take part in, it could still bring up painful memories and experiences.

One woman wanted to talk about her experiences and as part of the initial process, we asked about the support she currently had in her life and links with services. She had not linked with any support as she felt fine, had no real regrets about being involved in escorting and felt in a good place. Support was set up for her just in case she needed it. Through the process of telling and re-telling her story, issues arose, and she wanted to avail of the specialist support. Feeling safe and starting to talk about things that had happened to her made her realise that there was a lot she needed to work through and be supported with.

A lot of the women had never disclosed involvement in the sex industry to close family members whilst involved or exited. Some had told friends, but the majority had not. Others relied on women also involved but found that when they exited, they were no longer part of peer support groups. They lost that valuable support when they moved on.

Anyone who is carrying out lived experience work needs to be aware that women may not be able to discuss the project with family and friends and talk through anything that arises for them, therefore missing that opportunity to talk through the process.





## COST – REIMBURSEMENT AND EXPENSES

It is important to acknowledge the time and expertise from women when they are involved in lived experience work. The need for recompense is now more widely recognised and is worthy of consideration and discussion to ensure it is in the best interests of the women themselves.

In Inside Outside, we didn't put any mention of payment or vouchers on promotional material as women who had exited CSE advised against this due to the dynamics and differing motivations it could introduce. Women were not aware they would be getting any form of reimbursement and were given vouchers at the end of their time with the project. For some women it was at an earlier stage, and some very late on as we didn't want it to seem that we were subtly pressurising women to complete different stages of the project.

We didn't offer cash as women and workers had experience of women not being able to have access to or being able to spend such money due to financial control and coercion from partners and pimps. We were also mindful that women had been paid for sex and we wanted to reduce any power differentials in the work.

Women had also spoken about a "skewed" relationship with money where the sense of perspective can be changed. Vouchers meant that women had the choice of what to use them on – food, clothes, make up. Some women used the vouchers to buy toys and treats for their children and one woman bought new bedding, so they had a special set to put on after punters had left.

For some women, receiving vouchers could have a negative impact on their income e.g., women who are seeking asylum or are a refugee may have to declare vouchers as income and so have allowances reduced.

## LEVELS OF PARTICIPATION

We learnt over time that women need the chance to have different levels of engagement, a pyramid in which they could choose what level they wanted to be involved in. This could be at the level of completing surveys through to 1-1 discussion to contributing experiences and views and being involved in small groups as editorial teams or working groups. Each piece of lived experience work was designed to have different levels and options for women.

This flexibility allowed them to opt in and opt out at different times, especially if a lot of changes or demands in their own lives took priority.

After a lot of contact and discussions, one woman was going to write some pieces for different resources and tools. She had clear ideas on her content and approach, but some major things happened in her life and so her availability changed. She was not able to write the pieces but was able to link in with the project and have an editorial role and reviewed content and design. The project was designed to allow flexibility and changed plans did not exclude her from participating and having a role.

We held a webinar for women looking at issues around The Misuse of Images for women involved in selling and exchanging sexual images online. Women with lived experience were involved in planning this event including programme development, promotion and engagement along with presenting. Participants at the webinar were then offered the chance to engage in a small working group to discuss:

- the challenges women face
- what their experiences were and coping strategies / tools
- the key information other women would need
- design a website and develop materials

A number of women became involved, attending regular online meetings for discussion, reflection and planning. Some women then volunteered for tasks such as writing content whilst others choose not to become involved at that level but still made valuable contributions. This model allowed women to engage at different levels, choosing the one that suited them best.

## BENEFIT AND VALUE

Women have taken part in projects for a variety of reasons – some more personal and some more focused on affecting wider change. Women have appreciated the chance to have their experiences heard and their voice listened to but for others, it was to make situations better, to prevent other women being affected or harmed. For some, they wanted to change services, call for more resources and changed approaches.

*"I feel released and this way I will stay from today on. Hopefully the girls who sees my project and photos, they will think about their future and do what they feel inside the heart, and no listening to the wallet. Happiness is when you feel beautiful inside and out. Happiness is when you believe in you. Happiness is starting with you. Money aren't everything but our happiness is."*  
– Inside Outside

Taking part can satisfy those motivations and be of benefit to women but latterly, we have taken a different approach to give the women more tangible experiences and opportunities.

As Wendy said:

*"Getting my story out has freed me in ways... You know it's like somebody just cut the strings and my wings and now they can go. If I can stop just one girl sufferin' and endurin' all the stuff in my life, then everything I've gone through and worked to achieve will've been well worth it."*  
– Inside Outside

Whilst women can find aspects of taking part in in-depth lived experience work difficult, they also found participating very beneficial and for some, the process of engagement and taking part boosted their confidence, their self-esteem and their aspirations/ options for the future. Levi spoke about how she had never had a whole block of time just for her with the chance to talk about her life without the context of seeing how her methadone script was going or what housing issue did she need help with. There was real value for her in a relative stranger who had a room booked for a whole day to just listen.

In Inside Outside, we wanted the women who took part to come away with something tangible, something concrete for them that they could look at and feel proud of. When we were developing the book – the women were involved in coming up with the fundamentals of the design of the book, they were very much part of that element of the creative process – understanding how design works. One of the women was very much into that aspect and shared a passion for weights and textures of the paper for inside the book. The women picked the signature images for the overall project / exhibition and contributed to the design of promotional materials.



One of the women found a love of and talent for photography and was keen to continue it, another woman started writing short stories about her experience and another was involved in community arts projects.

This was a key part of the work – women should be very much part of co-producing as many elements of the overall work as possible. Any work with women should find ways to open doors for her to explore beyond the parameters and time frame of any engagement and research etc.

*“Its amazing reading all the feedback from people who have been to the exhibition. I am so glad it is being received as well as it is. Full credit to everyone involved who have given woman like me a voice after years of silence.”*

## VALIDATING

The work should be validating for the women and all elements of the process should recognise each woman participating as an individual with rich complex lives and backgrounds. Consideration needs to run through all elements with emphasis on co-producing high quality resources and products. In Inside Outside the women were very proud of the final book:

*“I think the idea of getting women to tell their stories in such an individual way and using our minds to create something so beautiful that is going to reach so many people is amazing and shows why we shouldn't be ashamed of our stories – they are our stories. They have made us who we are.”*

Joanne from Inside Outside was nominated for an award for her input to Inside Outside. This was a huge achievement for her and boosted her esteem and confidence.<sup>8</sup>

Women involved in the CLiCK Magazine were very proud of how the magazine looked and all thought the consideration that had gone into each element placed their work on a level it needed to be to ensure that people listened to what they were saying.

## IDENTITY, SAFETY AND EXPOSURE

For many women, the fear of being outed or identified as involved in selling or exchanging sex or images is huge and can impact on many areas of their lives from not disclosing to health professionals, to avoiding contact with their children's school to unwillingness to take part in consultations.

Women did not want to take part in workshops and groups together – they felt too exposed and worried that others now knew they had sold sex. We organised small group workshops for Inside Outside but women did not want to attend, cancelling at the last minute. In our experience, bringing women together in a group has proven to be a challenge for them and needs consideration in future work. Women have said that they don't want to open up and disclose with women they don't know and equally with women they are connected with. Kandi spoke about the lack of trust amongst women but also the fear of revealing how she really felt to others with whom she would have to continue seeing.

8. <https://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/work-awards/>

Wendy from Inside Outside spoke about how her mother found out she was involved in street prostitution. A camera crew for the national news was filming in the area where she commonly stood to be collected by punters in cars. She was in the background of the report, had her back to the camera and was a distance away. Her mother watched the news that night and immediately recognised her daughter, who then had to deal with being outed like that. It had a detrimental impact on their relationship.

Throughout the work, women chose their own names and changes were made to hide aspects of their lives and experiences which may inadvertently out them – such as sex of children, locations, sometimes timeframes. More often women removed parts of their stories and on a few occasions, we suggested details that should be edited out as they could have negative impacts on their lives and on others around them if they were linked.

This also happened on a different scale, which meant the women with Inside Outside could not be linked with the exhibition or promotion around it.

An example is outlined in the blog:

*“Sadly, when we started to post and mention #insideoutsidebelfast on social media, a few ripples started. Murmurs that some people were not happy for us to be there, that we were not welcome, that Belfast was “done” with us, that we would be stopped. A lot went on in the background (the telling of that would require a mammoth post) and we had to take the difficult decision to not put Katie on the stage. We couldn’t guarantee it would be safe for her and that her identity could be protected.*

...

*If there were people “unhappy” at Inside Outside being there, how could we put Katie in an awkward position? How could we ask her to put herself in a vulnerable position with little control, no choice on what people posted on social media and not in a position to consent to her image possibly being used.*

*She wasn’t to get her 10 minutes in the spotlight, her place at the top table and space on the panel.”*

*– Inside Outside Blog*

## CREDIBILITY AND THE MEDIA

Women have been brave, open and honest – sharing the positive and negative impacts of being involved in selling and exchanging sex. Their identities were protected to make sure they could be anonymous, but this meant that women were not able to speak out and defend themselves when there were accusations that they did not exist. Part of the preparation and information given to women around taking part in “Inside Outside” and “Outside” included this possibility along with highlighting the impact of not being believed. It was challenging for the women to see tweets accusing the Women’s Support Project of fabricating them and their realities.

We had also prepared the women that their stories may appear in the press, over which they and we may have little control. Journalists and editors may take their word out of context and focus only on certain elements.

We have preferred to try and build relationships with journalists to ensure they have the broader context around work, its aims and women involved. In Inside Outside, we linked with a journalist who we knew had previously covered different VAWG features. She interviewed Wendy about her life and experiences:

*"Taking part in Inside Outside has built her confidence and she is currently trying to set up a youth project to help prevent other young people going down the same path; she sees them in her neighbourhood, hanging round kebab shops and smoking bongs."*

– The Scotsman

We wrote a blog outlining that process which includes an input from Wendy.

*"Sharing my story I can see many emotions in her eyes from empathy to sadness to joy. We discuss 'the mask' and I am instantly drawn to the mask that hangs on my bedroom wall. I had painted it a couple of years ago while on an arts and crafts day with my wee boy. It was long before my involvement with Inside Outside but since I met Linda and read the other women's stories that mask has more relevance than I could have ever imagined when painting it."*

...

*At one point following a couple of funny interruptions from my boy and dog, we discuss how hard it was for me to find anyone professional or otherwise to discuss my time on the streets. I explain how hard it was to try to get anyone to help me work through the issues that have been left scarred on my heart from those cold lonely nights. I tell her that without Inside Outside I would still be bottling it all up. Inside Outside gave me my Voice and allowed me to use it freely."*

*She was interested to hear how people react now when I talk about my time inside prostitution and asks me how I feel now discussing these things. I giggle to myself because I am no longer afraid to talk about the awkward stuff as I am comfortable with myself and why I have those awkward conversations."*

– Inside Outside Blog



## BE KEPT INFORMED OF WHERE THEIR VOICES HAVE GONE AND ANY CHANGES

Women have expressed disillusionment at taking part in any research, consultations or surveys etc – asking why should they take part when it wouldn't change anything? They see little progress in meeting their needs or tangible positive changes to their lives. Discussions that happen at strategic and policy level have little obvious benefit to women and so they question what the point in expressing their opinion and needs when little changes. For some women, their motivation in taking part in our work was to have a chance to have their voice heard to affect change for others. If they see little change, then they see little value given to what they have shared and means they are even less likely to participate in the future.

Barbie in Outside spoke about her anger at the lack of services available and how sidelined women in CSE are in comparison to other forms of VAWG such as domestic abuse where there at least appears to be a lot more support, resources and investment.

It is really important for women to see where their voices have gone, who has heard them and did anybody listen with any changes resulting.

CLiCK magazine had a section online where women's lived experience, voices and opinions had been shared and outlined how important this kind of feedback is.

*"CLiCK have been working with women to ensure their needs, voices, and experiences are heard at the strategic level to influence real, tangible change on the ground. This can be a very slow process and we understand that, for women, it can often feel like change is never coming. We want to take some time to draw attention to – and celebrate – some pieces of work that women have directly influenced whilst continuing to hold decision makers, local authorities, and support services accountable. This work is far from over. Women's voices will only have a measurable impact if there is a commitment from national leadership to listen to women, carry out action based on women's real needs and experiences, and develop a clear strategy to support joined up working from a strategic level down to a local, community level to ensure that Scotland's support landscape and policy works for all women with lived experience of selling or exchanging sex or images."*

– Click Magazine



In Inside Outside we shared information with women and the public through the blog we ran – to give a rapid active account of where exactly women's voices had gone, what were the reactions, who had engaged and what higher level discussions were taking place. The women found this very powerful and was of real benefit in them feeling valued and considered.

As Katie said:

*"Following it all on social media is crazy. I don't know what other way to describe it. I had no idea how many people would read it and be touched by it. It's still surreal but amazing to see how many people have been following and all so interested in the project and where it is going. Getting feedback on my pictures that someone else actually liked them was amazing. I am so proud and humbled to see it all."*

Katie said:

*"Recently I have learnt to look at my story in a whole new light! I may not be proud of the things I have done and the paths I have walked. There have definitely been detours or scenic routes in my life. Many scenes I do not want to see again, but I was told this "There's nothing wrong with your past as long as you're a better person now and having something like that to remind you of what has will keep your mind focused on what's on ahead." Today has been an especially powerful and emotional day! I went to Dundee to see the project in all of its beauty! And wow what a powerful thing it is to see! Quite surreal actually, no one knowing who I am and that my pictures are on that wall. My story is in that book you're going to read."*  
– Inside Outside Blog

## OWNERSHIP

Women who participate in qualitative lived experience work need to feel a sense of ownership and that it is their project / research and not just a passive participant. Opportunities should be built in to ensure that they can contribute to the development of the work itself and recognise their input into it.





# LIVED EXPERIENCE THROUGH CLiCK

**CLiCK is a partnership of organisations working together to provide emotional and practical support to women involved in selling or exchanging sex or images in Scotland to support their safety and wellbeing.**

CLiCK provided ways through “Your Voice” for women involved in selling sex online to have a voice in developing and improving the support services around their health, safety and wellbeing. The Women's Support Project supervised some elements of CLiCK work including “Your Voice”.<sup>9</sup>

This included:

- Consultation and information events for women
- Online surveys
- Online groups / workshops
- Podcasts
- Editorial and creative teams
- Writing articles and creative pieces

Your Voice used direct methods of engaging with women:

- Callouts to women via social media, as well as speaking with women already linked in with Your Voice
- Using the CLiCK Magazine to reach out to women and provide opportunities for their voices to be heard
- Call outs via established links with other agencies such as AnotHER Way, Vice Versa and G3 Clinic

And indirect methods:

- Speaking with established networks such as Encompass to promote Your Voice keeping them up to date with the various opportunities to have women's voices heard
- Making links with other organisations as a way of raising awareness of the needs of women who sell or exchange sex and keeping them up to date with the various opportunities to have women's voices heard

Women were involved in the CLiCK magazine – an online platform for women with lived experience of selling or exchanging sex or images to make their voices heard during the coronavirus pandemic.

Women's needs and experiences were explored through:

- a monthly podcast series (**CLiCK Cast**)
- an anonymous survey platform (**RISE**)
- a wellbeing arts-based project exploring self-care (**Together, Alone**) and
- a dedicated space for women to tell parts of their story (**Your Voice**)

The CLiCK Development Worker and CLiCK Resource and Information Officer turned the website content into articles, women worked in two teams to influence the design of the magazine (Creative Editorial Team) and produce new features (Writer's Team).<sup>10</sup>

9. <https://www.click.scot/voice/>

10. <https://www.clickmagazine.online/>

The Creative Editorial Team worked alongside the CLiCK Development Worker and a graphic designer to create the front and back cover, illustrations, and colour palette. CLiCK Women's Workers supported women as part of the Writer's Team to produce two new pieces for the magazine **A Letter From Women** – a statement on what women would like decision makers and support services to know about their needs, and **What's Next?** – a set of recommendations for support services on how they can best meet the rights and needs of women who sell or exchange sex or images.

Providing a space for women to make their voice heard and amplifying women's varied needs and experiences to shape service delivery and policy has always been at the core of CLiCK. The magazine highlights this, presenting women's diverse views – some of which may not align with broader strategic VAWG approaches. It was felt important to include all of these views as the women themselves have presented them.

The magazine is the culmination of their hard work, experience, and resilience and the women took part as a call to action which holds the Scottish Government, local authorities, and support services accountable to listen to women's needs and experiences and do everything in their power to ensure that Scotland's support landscape and policy meets the rights and needs of all women with lived experience of selling or exchanging sex or images.

Feedback was sought from women who were involved in the Creative Editorial Team. One woman said:

*"Seeing the finished covers feels great. I enjoyed being creative and it felt good for my thoughts and ideas to be welcomed and taken seriously."*

*The process was more challenging than I anticipated. I found deciding some details of the covers (before having visuals) hard and overwhelming at times."*

*I was surprised how the design process triggered some personal issues. It brought up things like perfectionism, avoidance, low self-esteem and fear of conflict - all of which have had a detrimental effect on my life."*

*I quickly realised that they were my issues, and I was able to start to work through them. I became determined. I didn't avoid or run away. I kept aware of how I was feeling. I stayed with the process, and for that I feel proud."*

*I'm so glad I've gone through this journey and that we got to the other side. I feel some ownership of the covers. It has been a very positive, rewarding and healing experience and I feel extremely grateful to have had this opportunity."*





Another woman said:

*"I really enjoyed it, being able to collaborate, yet stay anonymous – not just because of the subject matter, but also useful to feel free to be creative and put down ideas. I really love the covers, I think they're amazing. Felt great seeing ideas become designs and it felt nice to be consulted in the process. It was interesting to see another way into creatively collaborating with people – this could feed into my future research work. I'm a creative person so it's been really interesting being involved in creative ways of researching and to think that I can look more at this in the future."*



# CONCLUSION

The authentic involvement of women who are currently involved or have exited from selling or exchanging sex or images in service development, policy and strategic discussions and any legislative changes that are proposed in Scotland are a necessity which no-one disputes.

With the greater acceptance and focus on engagement, consultation and participation with women there also needs to be consideration given to the resources, who is delivering this work and to what end – what will this participation change.



# KATIE – EXPERIENCE OF BEING INVOLVED

One of the participants from Inside Outside wrote of her experience of the project - here are her words.

*"Hi, I am Katie. I am in my early twenties. I was inside the sex industry in Scotland for 4 years. I started in indoors prostitution through brothels and saunas. I recently exited the sex industry and have no desire to go back.*

*Life isn't always as it seems. My journey has not been one of a posh silver spooned girl. I have been hurt & broken to a point I couldn't recognise the person looking back at me. I've been through physical and mental abuse from those I trusted, trusted with my life. I've been used and abused.*

*People now look at me like I can't handle myself, how wrong they'd be.*

*I may not be proud of the things I have done and the paths I have walked. There have definitely been detours or scenic routes in my life. Many scenes I do not want to see again but recently I have learnt to look at my story in a whole new light!*

*As I continue to move forward in my journey, there is continuous changing factors. People coming, people going, moving on, falling backwards. Making memories and reminiscing. I've learnt it doesn't matter if a person has been in your life for 5 years or 5 minutes, the most real ones are those that show loyalty when it counts. They're the people I need in my life, they're the ones that push me to better my life. Not those who are sitting waiting for me to fall back into my old ways.*

*It's true if anyone had told me the reality of this lifestyle, I would have searched every other option. But would I have really believed them?*

*When I was inside the sex industry – It was basically like living two lives.*

*You have your work life and your family, friends, partners think you do something else. You have to keep up this fake act. Something could have happened at work and they would have no idea why you were so upset. They wouldn't understand and you can't come out and tell them. No. You just wouldn't.*

There was times that you want to like, just scream and tell them and then they maybe they would understand why you are, like, you are. But then at the same time, it's not worth it. It's hard to keep them separate but you must.

My support worker told me about Inside Outside.

I thought it sounded different and quite interesting, something I would like to be involved in. I wanted to take part as I always like to try new things and learn new skills along the way. I thought it would be an interesting project to be part of. I can say now I underestimated how powerful it would actually be.

I worked with Linda for my interview. It was a bit of a weird one for me as mentally and emotionally I was in a very fragile place around that time. I had been so close to pulling out and cancelling the whole thing. I'm so happy i carried on with it.

It was pretty scary telling my story. It makes it more real when you hear yourself say it out loud. Having the digital recorder there it made me think more about what I was saying and how I was saying it. I'm not all that sure how I decided what to tell. I guess I told the stuff in a slightly more PG version. I don't think I would take back anything that I said, No.

After the interview I got the transcript. Oh that transcript... Wow how odd reading every word the ums & ehhs. And so so long. I read through it and decided what I wanted to share/not share. I didn't want anything in it that would identify me or mean that people could recognise me.

My photo ideas came quite naturally to me. They were forever changing though. I got quite into the project from then on. I started taking pictures in my everyday life and surroundings that represent parts of my story and editing them to my liking. It was hard to narrow down to the ones I was actually going to use in the project. I really enjoyed it. Expressing myself and telling a story through pictures.

The project was launched in Holyrood. Going there to it was so incredibly nerve racking and terrifying but amazing. I ran to the parliament all stressed that I was going to be late to see my own photos, in we go through all the security. We walked down the long glass corridor to a huge smile and cuddle from Linda.

Seeing all the ladies photos and hearing their individual stories had me holding back tears (we all were) relating to parts of them all. That is such a memorable and important day for me.

I got my copy of the book that day – it is beautiful! My story takes up A LOT of pages! I am so proud of it and to be in it.

When the exhibition opened in Dundee – I went to the launch night. It was so emotional! I remember listening to Linda speak, it was very moving and at a few moments during it I could feel myself tearing up! Hoping no one would notice. So moving! Quite surreal actually, no one there knowing who I am and that my pictures are on that wall. My story is in that book you're going to read.

Seeing my work on tour... hmmm I don't know if that's actually hit home yet!

Following it all on social media is crazy. I don't know what other way to describe it. I had no idea how many people would read it and be touched by it. It's still surreal but amazing to see how many people have been following and all so interested in the project and where it is going. Getting feedback on my pictures that someone else actually liked them was amazing. I am so proud and humbled to see it all.

I've kept writing blogs because I really enjoy it, it's a release for me, a place to escape. For people following the project and those supporting it to see we're real, we don't just disappear after you read our stories. Our stories are still playing out.

I felt the idea of the women telling their stories could be very eye opening to both those inside and outside of the sex industry as everyone's story is different. I think the idea of getting women to tell their stories in such an individual way and using our minds to create something so beautiful that is going to reach so many people is amazing. We shouldn't be ashamed of our stories – they're our stories. They have made us who we are. What we are involved in may not be others' reality, but it is ours and millions of other women and men around the world.

There is so much more to my story than what is there in that interview and in my chapter in the book.

Example – What swings and roundabouts my life had been through to get me to the point that that was my only option. About the ups and downs of really working, the amazing people I met, how in a weird, warped way I'm thankful that I've been through it all because realistically if I hadn't I wouldn't be the person I am now or where I am now.

I have learnt quite a lot about myself throughout the course of this project so far which I didn't expect to.

*I learnt I actually like taking pictures and editing, that I'm arty. That I'm stronger than I thought I was, after going over my story realising how much I have dealt with and overcome and to the fact I'm still here I'm still standing still doing something positive.*

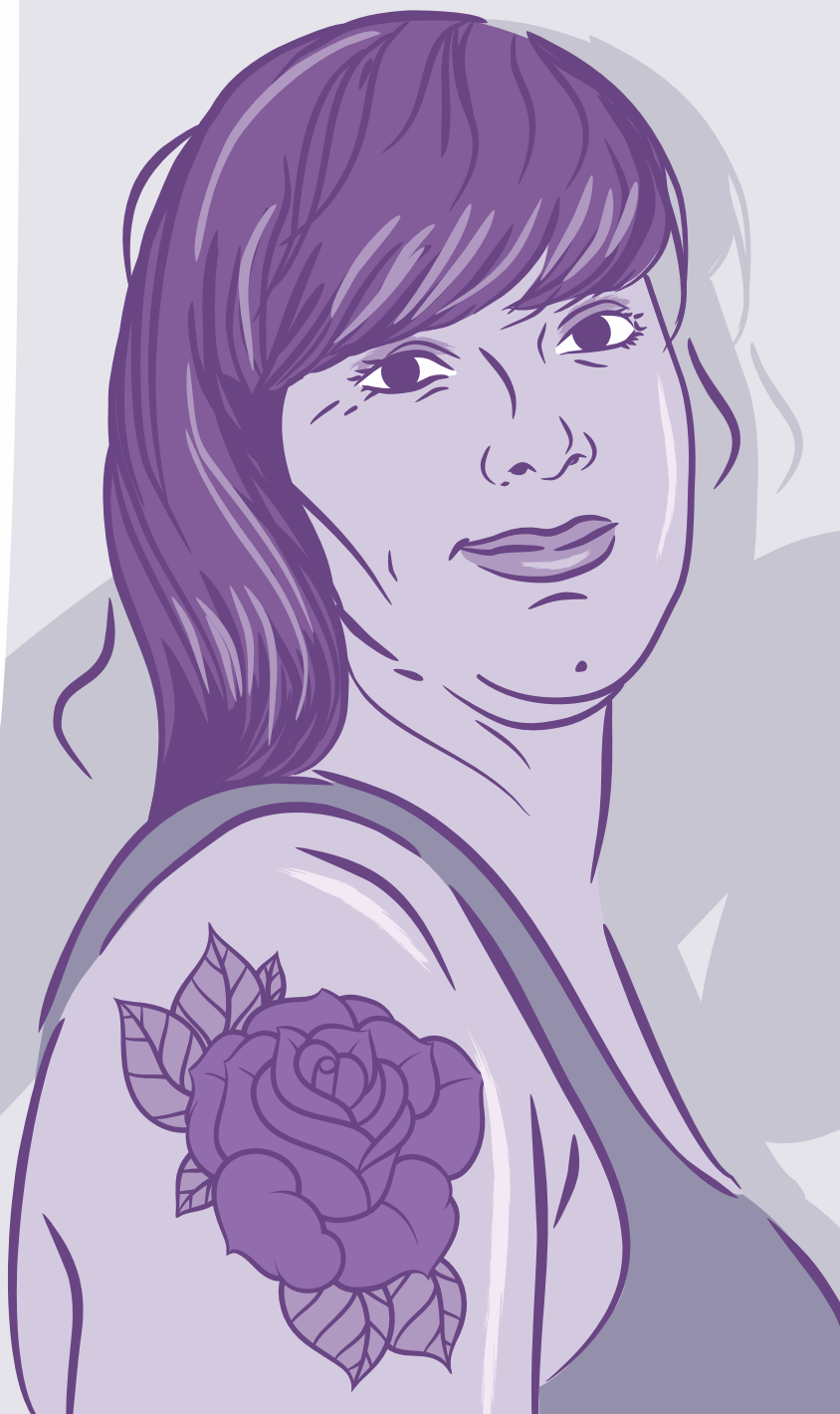
*I truly believe if it was not for the project I would not be where I am today. I got a new beginning, a positive future and a new outlook from the project and I cannot be more thankful.*

*I would like to see more projects like this reaching more women and for them not to be scared of getting involved, that you never know it may open doors for their exit out of the industry if that is what they want for themselves. For more women to know that Inside Outside is a safe place with so much support that they can tell their stories.*

*For them to know not everyone judges."*

*– Inside Outside Blog*

Thank you, Katie.





*“Hopefully the girls who sees my project and photos, they will think about their future and do what they feel inside the heart.”*



*“Women who haven’t  
had a platform and  
who felt ignored were  
our priority.”*



[www.encompassnetwork.info](http://www.encompassnetwork.info)

