



**EXITING**

**PROSTITUTION:**

**WHAT NEXT?**

**ENCOMPASS NETWORK 2021**



**“It’s a bloody hard  
thing to do... to exit  
the sex industry.”**



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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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

Their generosity in sharing some of their most difficult and challenging times has allowed us the chance to learn. The strengths, resilience and skills they used to leave the sex industry also give us insights that are not often seen.

We also thank the women in the case studies, and those from Outside and from the Inside Outside project.<sup>1</sup> We have changed names and some details to protect women's anonymity. Barbie chose her own pseudonym. Please take time to read their accounts before you proceed with the document (see page 66 onwards). We have changed names and some details to protect women's anonymity and all women chose their own pseudonym.



1. <https://www.insideoutsidescotland.info/>

# SUMMARY

## WHERE WE ARE NOW

**For many years, the Encompass Network has called for more action to support women to move on from (exit) commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) when they choose to.**

When women decide to no longer sell or exchange sex, they continue to experience severe challenges and difficulties. Indeed, it can be harder to leave prostitution than to remain. There has been little action to make leaving more straightforward.

Services and violence against women partnerships (VAWPs) have been asking for a clear strategic approach aligned with Equally Safe, and national leadership to support local action. Without this, they find it difficult to reach common understanding, agree local strategies and take action to implement approaches to supporting women.

There are only eight frontline services with specialist staff on CSE across Scotland. They form the core of the Encompass Network:

- Another Way, Sacro, Edinburgh and Lothian
- Aberdeen Cyrenians, Ending Violence and Abuse, Aberdeen
- ADA, Quay Services, Aberdeen
- CLiCK (funding ends May 2021)
- Routes Out, Glasgow
- Vice Versa (WRASAC, Women's Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre, Dundee and Angus)
- RASAC (Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre) Perth and Kinross (one worker for CSE)
- TARA (for women who have been trafficked to Scotland for CSE)

The Women's Support Project has a lead role in co-ordinating activity and a programme of work on behalf of Encompass.

Encompass Network services support women while they are involved in selling and exchanging sex and offer support when they want to exit. The focus is on supporting women, but services have supported men and members of the trans community too, and much of this guidance is also relevant to them. A few of these services are very small (one part-time worker) with little in the way of designated resources. There is not wide geographical coverage.

Although there has been positive exiting work with women moving on, and notable initiatives on supporting women to exit, these have had to operate in the absence of a well-resourced consistent national strategy that can translate to support local responses to CSE as a form of violence against women and girls (VAWG).

Developing and providing exiting support that meets women's needs has had to take place within a context in which the socio-economic factors that push women into prostitution have not been addressed. These factors are still there if they leave. It also means that other women continue to enter CSE when they might not otherwise have done. And, in turn, face the same barriers to exiting.

The pandemic has highlighted the inequalities that women live with, and the circumstances they faced in lockdown. Increased numbers of women wanted support to leave. As a consequence, the Encompass Network has called for a national strategic focus on women who want to, or who have to, exit from prostitution, and more support to develop service responses.

Any action needs to be trauma-informed and flexible in order to respond to women's ongoing and emerging needs while involved in selling or exchanging sex. Women also need realistic and positive options when they move on.

This document pulls information together in order to consider where we are now; what needs to happen; and how that could be achieved.

## WHAT NEXT?

While we await the findings from the recent Scottish Government consultation, to be discussed, agreed, included in action plans with allocations of resources, the Encompass Network calls for immediate action. Women cannot wait for further reviews, scoping exercises and short-term funding cycles before concrete steps are taken to agree a national exiting strategy and action plan with an expectation of local implementation.

National leadership is required. Given the breadth of the agenda, we believe this should be a joint portfolio between the Minister for Community Safety and the Minister for Older People and Equalities.

The Joint Strategic Board for Equally Safe could instruct the multi-agency group on CSE (MAGCSE) and a reconvened COSLA multi-agency short-term CSE working group to produce a suggested strategy for exiting which is informed by evidence from women with lived experience, and especially by women who have left the sex industry and had time to consider the full impact of their involvement.

Local responses, co-ordinated by the VAWPS should recognise women's heightened risks and vulnerabilities and all plans should be embedded in local areas' resilience and recovery planning.

The Encompass Network recommends:

- 1 A national strategic framework should be developed to ensure a consistent approach.
- 2 This should define the core aspects of any local approaches, standards of service and principles of good practice.
- 3 VAWPs should have lead responsibility for developing a local implementation plan to include the range of stakeholders and services.
- 4 Local approaches should take a multi-agency and partnership approach with a commitment to long-term engagement.
- 5 All approaches must be trauma-informed and flexible to address a range of needs.
- 6 Monitoring and evaluation systems for strategies, plans and approaches should include clear targets, reviews and willingness to adapt and change based on outcomes for women.
- 7 Local services should identify a champion or named leads within universal and mainstream services to ensure links to and from services to strategic groups.
- 8 Work at national and local levels needs to be informed by direct engagement with, and participation from, women who have experience of CSE and exiting.
- 9 There should be national and local capacity-building.
- 10 There should be adequate funding and resourcing over the long-term.

With a new government at the time of writing (May 2021), there is an opportunity for a fresh look and new commitment.

# ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

**The Women's Support Project, on behalf of the Encompass Network, has written this paper because systematic action is needed to support women who want to leave (exit) prostitution. Although the focus is on prostitution, women want to leave other forms of CSE and need similar support to do so.**

We are hopeful of concrete action on CSE as a form of VAWG. The Scottish Government has completed its consultation 'Equally Safe consultation on challenging men's demand for prostitution, working to reduce the harms associated with prostitution, and helping women to exit', which is due to report. We anticipate more discussion and action as a result. We hope this paper will inform consideration of how best to support women in Scotland who want to exit prostitution.

Given the complexities around exiting, individual and societal, this paper is relevant to a broad audience. Commitment is needed at all levels, and from many partners. It cannot sit solely within the VAWG agenda.

This paper, therefore, is relevant to the work of:

- The Equally Safe Joint Strategic Board
- All Equally Safe partners
- COSLA Community Wellbeing Board
- COSLA short-term working group on commercial sexual exploitation
- Scottish Government working groups across various departments including equalities and justice
- Human trafficking and exploitation strategy – action areas 1 and 3
- Violence against women partnerships (VAWPs)
- Local authority chief officers and elected members
- Strategic and service leads in across areas such as housing, homelessness, mental health, sexual and reproductive health, employability, addictions, child and adult protection and community justice

## WOMEN'S ACCOUNT OF EXITING

The experiences of women have informed all elements of this paper. We are grateful for the contribution from survivors directly and through various forums. The combined years and range of experience have given direction and focus. We have also included four accounts from women who have exited (to some degree) from page 66 onwards. They deserve to be read first as their stories clearly illustrate all the components of what needs to happen at national and local level to give women options and alternatives in answer to 'what's next?'



## WHAT ELSE IS IN THIS DOCUMENT

This document also includes:

- Brief context about prostitution in Scotland and the implications of the pandemic for exiting
- Some context on progress to date relevant to exiting
- Main issues women face in exiting prostitution
- Examples of exiting models
- Components of a multi-agency approach in a local authority area
- Recommended actions

## NOTE ON LANGUAGE

Within this paper, we use the term 'selling and exchanging sex' and 'women who exchange or sell sex' as this does not ascribe an identity to women but instead describes activities they are involved in. Also, many women who use Encompass Services would not identify with the term 'sex worker'. We do not want to apply a term to them that they have not chosen themselves.

## NOTE ON SOURCES

It has been beyond the scope of this document to do a full literature review. However, it refers to systematic reviews conducted in Scotland and elsewhere, and highlights points which are particularly relevant to different facets of exiting. This includes an excerpt from the Scottish Government's 2020 consultation, itself based on an evidence review commissioned by Justice.

We have drawn heavily on evidence-based documents produced by Stand Against Sexual Exploitation (SASE), of which the Encompass Network and other Scottish services are members. We believe that SASE's blueprint and guidance provide the best and clearest guide for action. We do not want to duplicate or repeat the work and thinking that have already been done.

All URLs were correct at the time of publication.

## MORE INFORMATION

The Encompass Network and the Women's Support Project can provide further information about this guidance and other information about CSE.

# BUILDING ON EXPERIENCE AND CONSENSUS

**This paper builds on years of knowledge and experience. This includes those of women with lived experience who have led the way in articulating what exiting means.**

Specialist frontline services have always supported women who want to exit, helping them to identify their own skills and resources. Services know that women can and do move on. Equally, they know how difficult and challenging this can be, particularly for women in financial hardship or who are dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), mental health problems, alcohol misuse and/or addictions.

Although the Scottish Government, COSLA, NHS Health Scotland (now Public Health Scotland), VAWPs and others have worked to address prostitution and other forms of CSE, there needs to be more focus on exiting and on a more systematic basis.

There are only eight frontline services with specialist staff on CSE across Scotland. They form the core of the Encompass Network:

- Another Way, Sacro, Edinburgh and Lothian
- Aberdeen Cyrenians, Ending Violence and Abuse, Aberdeen
- ADA, Quay Services, Aberdeen
- CLiCK, national (funding ended May 2021)
- Routes Out, Glasgow
- Vice Versa (WRASAC, Women's Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre, Dundee and Angus)
- RASAC (Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre) Perth and Kinross (one worker for CSE)
- TARA, national (for women who have been trafficked to Scotland for CSE)

The Women's Support Project has a lead role in co-ordinating activity and a programme of work on behalf of Encompass

Currently, around seven of Scotland's 32 local authorities have a stated position on prostitution, and more local authorities intend to follow suit. However, it is difficult for a local authority or its partners to have a position on exiting without a position statement on prostitution. It therefore follows that it is virtually impossible to ensure concrete measures and interventions to support women exiting. By and large, they have to exit without support.

Different VAWPs have progressed work on a local strategic level but it has not always been easy to gain the support needed to embed understanding or to access resources. The Women's Support Project held a development day for VAWPs in 2015 on how to develop a local CSE strategy. Participants discussed the challenges which included active opposition by sex work lobby groups and campaigns, lack of understanding, and not seeing CSE as a local issue or priority. VAWP co-ordinators identified the challenges resulting from the lack of clear guidance and national leadership.

The National VAW Network adopted a position on CSE in 2016. The Women's Support Project, with the National VAW Network and the Improvement Service, then drafted a position statement for local areas to review, adapt and adopt. Several have now adopted a position statement on CSE which includes reference to exiting:

- In 2017, East Ayrshire adopted a position statement on CSE which advocated for measures to 'provide support and exiting services for those exploited through prostitution'<sup>2</sup>
- West Lothian VAWP proposed a position statement on CSE in 2018 which recommended support for exiting
- A pan-Lanarkshire position statement was adopted in March 2021 with Heather Knox, NHS Lanarkshire chief executive saying, 'Gender-based violence is recognised as a public health priority and NHS Lanarkshire ensures our staff are aware of the physical and mental health and wellbeing harms that can arise through commercial sexual exploitation. We continue to do everything we can to support women and others who are being exploited, offering support and means to exit prostitution and any other form of gender-based violence'<sup>3</sup>

## DECADES OF ACTIVITY BUT LITTLE LONG-TERM CHANGE

There is not the scope in this document to record around 30 years of activity and learning on exiting prostitution. Suffice to say that, despite innovative and positive models, exiting support has remained piecemeal, short-term, under-resourced and, at times, unsupported. This has meant that, largely, women's needs have not been met.

There has been some exceptional work, including the multi-agency approach to supporting women to exit street prostitution used by Routes Out of Prostitution, a Social Inclusion Partnership (SIP) formed in response to the murders of women in street prostitution in Glasgow in the 1990s. For the first time agencies were brought together, with a manager appointed to develop the multi-agency approach. It is a good example of a locally-focused multi-agency partnership which looked at how to support women to exit by addressing a broad range of needs. This was in the context of Glasgow City Council adopting a position statement on CSE in 2000 with strong political support and leadership.

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2. <https://docs.east-ayrshire.gov.uk/crpadmmin/2012%20agendas/council/23%20february%202017/position%20statement%20on%20prostitution.pdf>

3. <https://www.nhslanarkshire.scot.nhs.uk/prostitution-as-violence-against-women/>

The SIP evolved into the 'Routes Out' and the 'Routes Into' projects of the 2000s, with the current Routes Out project now mainstreamed as a Glasgow City Council service. The service has undergone redesign and has evolved to provide holistic support including harm reduction and exiting for women.

Encompass supports the provision of high quality, trauma-informed support services which aim to reduce the harm of CSE, provide emotional support and counselling, and support for those planning to exit or who are exiting. We work to a non-judgemental, person-centred approach, accepting and valuing each person involved in selling sexual activity for who they are: their skills, talents, inner resources, coping/survival strategies and future hopes.

The shared approach across Encompass for exiting is based on non-judgemental services which work with each woman where she is at, whether that is still involved in selling or exchanging sex or wanting to leave. If she wants to leave, either in the short- or long-term, a plan is developed alongside her based on her individual needs, experiences, skills and aspirations.

Another Way in Edinburgh has supported many women involved in street prostitution, lap dancing clubs, saunas and brothels to exit. It has formed strong links with the criminal justice sector, faith-based organisations, addictions and harm reduction services, and local health providers, and has shared expertise in local strategy planning groups.

At other times and in different ways, exiting support has been part of specialist CSE-focused work in VAWG services. Aurora, based in Edinburgh Rape Crisis and Vice Versa in WRASAC Dundee and Angus, have provided specialist exiting support as part of a wider service.

RASAC in Perth and Kinross has a part-time worker for CSE who works with women looking to exit prostitution. Women often present with multiple barriers to exiting such as addiction, homelessness, poverty, current or previous sexual and/or domestic abuse, current exploitative relationships and offending. RASAC works in a trauma-informed, survivor-centred way to explore what women want for the future. Support is then tailored to the individual using a variety of therapeutic support, advocacy, safety and stabilisation work. Given the complexity of women's needs, a multi-agency, holistic approach is required. RASAC has found that without a strategic approach, or joint agreements between these relevant services, the full package of support needed is often lacking in fundamental ways which means exiting then becomes impossible.

There are many other examples of excellent work across Scotland with addictions, counselling and sexual health services being key in supporting women while involved in prostitution but also as a consistent support when they leave. Strong links with such services has meant easier referral pathways into specialist CSE services/staff.

In 2002, The Women's Support Project published the first Scottish edition of a good practice guide, originally developed by Patricia Holmes of the Franki Women's Support Project, a voluntary organisation based in Bolton. This set out key principles for working with women involved in street prostitution, including on exiting. The Women's Support Project followed this up in 2010 with its 'Good practice resource for organisations working with women working in or vulnerable to prostitution' which included exiting.

Other guidance includes Public Health Scotland's updated (January 2021) guidance for health staff on CSE.<sup>4</sup>

SASE has done considerable work on evidence-based exit strategies and models. The Encompass Network is a member of SASE. So, in developing a more systematic approach, there is much to draw on, and no need to re-invent the wheel.

## WHERE CONSENSUS LIES

CSE is a complex area and has many facets, including indoor and outdoor prostitution, sex trafficking, pornography and online sales of sexual images and videos, with increasingly blurred lines between different forms of CSE. There are ongoing debates about 'choice' and 'rights'. This document will not resolve any of that nor is it the place to do so.

Where there is consensus is that some women want to leave and that many other women will want to do so at some stage in the near and more distant future. With that consensus, support needs to be in place when they do, and such support should be based on what is known to be good practice. It should be informed by women, especially those who have previously exited.

At policy level, although there is commitment through Equally Safe, there has not yet been an examination of exiting as a specific priority. At local level, the availability of support for any woman who wants to, or needs to, exit tends to be hit and miss and dependent on where she lives. It also tends to be short-term. Yet, from what we know of trauma, women need long-term support, and consistency so that, wherever they are in the country, they receive the right support and opportunities.

This paper makes the case for developing a national approach to, and local implementation of, exiting support that considers both strategic and operational features.

Developing our approach is consistent with Scotland's international obligations under the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and national commitments to promote human rights and gender equality, and to prevent VAWG.

The Encompass Network wants to see an exiting approach in Scotland that is:

- Long-term, trauma-informed and women-centred
- Informed by women who want to leave and women with experience of exiting
- Flexible and adaptable to meet the range of individual women's needs
- Relevant to the context of CSE across Scotland at any given time

With a new government at the time of writing (May 2021), there is an opportunity for a fresh look and new commitment.

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4. <http://www.healthscotland.scot/health-topics/gender-based-violence/commercial-sexual-exploitation>

# EXITING AND THE PANDEMIC

"The need for a long-term consistent well-resourced exiting model has been made even more apparent during [the pandemic]. Women [...] have described feeling trapped and faced with exiting prostitution under the emergency regulations, which means being unable to pay rent, or continuing to engage in prostitution while risking their health. Scotland urgently needs a comprehensive model of support for exiting, which can be accessed across the country, i.e. not limited to the main cities."

– Women's Support Project response to Scottish Government 'Challenging Demand' consultation 2020

## **The contexts and settings for selling/buying and exchanging money or goods for sex Scotland have changed in recent years with the move from the street to indoors and online, notably on social media.**

Research suggests that 90% of prostitution takes place indoors (Scottish Government, 2017a). Contacts are made through mobile phones and social media; women in prostitution typically have regular 'punters' rather than opportunistic street contact, or they have subscribers on social media platforms. There has been an increase in the number of students involved. The annual student money survey noted an increase in the number of students who are involved in selling or exchanging sex, estimating around 4% in 2019, an increase from 2% in 2017.<sup>5</sup> This is associated with rising living costs. The 2020 survey found that one in ten students would consider sex work in a cash emergency.<sup>6</sup>

The conditions that lead women into prostitution and other forms of CSE remain (for example poverty and financial pressures, drug and alcohol addiction, insecure immigration status). These conditions have been exacerbated by the pandemic.

## THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON WOMEN INVOLVED IN PROSTITUTION

The pandemic has brought new issues, and highlighted existing ones, for women involved in prostitution. In lockdown, women involved in prostitution have faced the same challenges as many other women including issues with housing, money, childcare, health services, home educating, caring responsibilities and more. However, they faced additional barriers to support because of stigma, fear of disclosing their specific circumstances and concerns about confidentiality (Encompass, September 2020).

5. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/sex-work-students-university-sugar-dating-debt-living-costs-a9166311.html>

6. <https://www.savethestudent.org/money/student-money-survey-2020.html>

Encompass Network members working directly with women report:

- Collapse in demand which significantly affected women's earnings
- Continued need to see clients despite restrictions and guidance related to staying at home and social distancing
- Heightened risk of violence and abuse with evidence that clients used women's financial vulnerability to pressure them to dispense with their usual safety measures but also to breach coronavirus restrictions
- Fear of arrest/fines related to selling sex in the same premises as others during lockdown
- Health concerns and risk related to coronavirus and lack of access to the usual health services

## INCREASED FOCUS ON EXITING

The pandemic has increased women's focus on exiting prostitution because:

- Risks from coronavirus meant that some women wanted to exit, notably those who were already thinking about leaving, saying it was the final push
- Other women weren't planning to leave but were forced to exit
- Some women reported to support services that they were forced to exit because 'the industry' quickly became saturated (women lost jobs and moved into prostitution; there has been an influx of 'new' and 'younger' women)
- Women selling sex were considered a high-risk non-shielding group because of the additional risk of coronavirus from their need to sell face-to-face/direct-contact sex. The Scottish Government provided some financial support through its 'immediate priorities funding' for the short-term crisis 'Encompass Fund'. This was part of a public health strategy to minimise coronavirus spread, with women receiving some limited funds
- Although the reasons for exiting have varied, there has been considerable anger on the part of women in touch with the Encompass Network when they realised that, as one woman put it, 'there is nothing for us'. The circumstances that may have led women into prostitution (lack of jobs, low pay, insecure work, lack of flexible work and so on) remain, and indeed, have worsened as a direct result of the pandemic

However, exiting can be a long and complicated process with individual factors affecting women such as:

- The impact of trauma
- Lack of confidence and self-value (I can't do it)
- Problematic alcohol and drug use
- Pimps and coercion from others (not allowed to leave)
- Job skills/gaps on CV
- Criminal record
- Housing and financial issues
- Stigma and shame



There are also other factors which women have described to Encompass Network members including: a woman's very identity may be tied up in prostitution: she can't see an alternative/isn't willing to lose her identity or an associated social network; women may want the lifestyle and possessions that earnings have brought which they would never otherwise have had; their connection to a supportive network of peers; the lack of anything feasible to exit to. A recent article from Close the Gap comments on the unprecedented impact of the pandemic on women's employment with young women and BAME women particularly affected.<sup>7</sup> These are some of the factors which any exiting model has to consider.

## EXITING AS A CHOICE

The Encompass Network does not support forced exit measures: compulsory rehabilitation such as arrest referral programmes, compliance agreements to work with outreach programmes, criminal and behaviour orders, curfews and imprisonment. Most fail to address the complex needs of women in prostitution. Criminalisation can negatively affect the chances of reducing women's social exclusion. We do not support making exiting prostitution a condition of accessing harm reduction or support services or other opportunities. This was our approach in administering the coronavirus hardship fund.<sup>8</sup>

## HIGHLIGHTING GAPS IN EXITING SUPPORT

During the pandemic many women in touch with Encompass Network members expressed the desire to exit. However:

- Reduced government support as lockdown reduces will place women into hardship, and that makes exit all the harder
- Other women may be drawn into prostitution who would not have considered it in other circumstances. This is associated with financial hardship as a result of job losses and ill health, and decreased, already limited, options
- There are few organisations knowledgeable or skilled enough to work directly with women on the different aspects of exiting which could include: physical and mental health issues; addictions and harm reduction; housing and homelessness; employability; welfare benefits; immigration status, connection to community; and much more
- There are not clear consistent comprehensive models and holistic pathways for exiting which organisations and staff can use to support individual women

These are the gaps which this paper discusses and wants to address.

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7. <https://onescotland.org/nacwg-news/provocation-author-women-and-employment-post-covid-19/>

8. <https://www.encompassnetwork.info/>



## WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

For all the areas of debate and disagreement around the topic of prostitution, there is some consensus that if women want to leave, most will need support at some point, whether in the short – or the long-term. If they do need support, then it should be provided. If we don't provide it, what does that mean for women themselves, any children they have, and for society generally? It is important to find an agreed and consistent way of supporting women to exit prostitution because:

- Prostitution can have a long-term impact on women, including on their health and mental health. Research into the mental health of sex workers in Switzerland found women in prostitution often suffered from mental health problems, including depression, anxiety and PTSD (Rossler et al, 2010) which can also negatively affect physical health
- If women are not supported to exit, they are likely to need ongoing and more interventions over their life course
- With support, women are more likely to move out of prostitution and to find sustainable alternatives
- As with other forms of VAWG, there are long-term individual, societal and community benefits to providing support and protection for victims as well as preventing and eliminating such abuse
- As with other forms of VAWG, there are economic benefits of providing the right support as early as possible
- Addressing the structural issues which push women into prostitution and keep them there would reduce the numbers of women entering prostitution in the first place

According to SASE<sup>9</sup> the economic benefits of funding exiting support are:

- Savings: exiting projects can save the public purse £2 for every £1 spent
- CJS and health: projects could save the criminal justice system alone in excess of £1 billion a year, and the health services in excess of £1.2 billion
- Social return: exiting has a huge social return on investment, which is good for both individuals and communities
- Sustainable: exit provides a sustainable solution, eradicating revolving doors [for women moving around services] and wasted money (dealing with crises instead of supporting women to move on)
- Better outcomes: commissioning the right services, instead of services that just tick boxes, means better costs savings and better outcomes

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9. [https://1425f57e-5a05-4bdc-8183-747efed61d9f.filesusr.com/ugd/7f14e6\\_db496f46cd0c4849a1481a3c3eab75b5.pdf](https://1425f57e-5a05-4bdc-8183-747efed61d9f.filesusr.com/ugd/7f14e6_db496f46cd0c4849a1481a3c3eab75b5.pdf)

## IPSWICH MODEL: ECONOMIC BENEFITS

After five women involved in street prostitution were murdered by a punter/client, a multi-agency strategy group formed comprising the local authority, social services, criminal justice and other public and third sector agencies. Their strategy focused on deterring punters/clients, prevention and awareness-raising, support, harm reduction and exiting. The exiting aspect offered multi-agency case conferences and health/welfare support packages to each woman involved in street prostitution. The work was funded by the key agencies involved in the multi-agency partnership. The exiting model was practical with financial support to pay for food, deposits for flats, the first month's rent and electricity. External evaluation found that this approach brought economic benefits to the public purse: 'A comparison of estimated professional hours as set against the potential costs to the criminal justice system showed that these costs are reduced from approximately £154,731 to £72,324 per annum, so that the work of the strategy is reducing the costs to the criminal justice system by 55%.'

– Boswell et al, 2013



**“I still had a wee bit of life left in me and I knew I had more to give. I had to give myself a chance to be a different person.”**



# NATIONAL CONTEXT AND DEFINITIONS

**This section sets out definitions and some of the policy, activity and initiatives relevant to this area.**

## COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Scottish Government definition:

Commercial sexual exploitation includes a wide range of often linked sexual activities which typically men profit from, or buy from women, and which objectify and harm women. Examples include:

- Prostitution
- Phone sex, internet sex or chatrooms
- Stripping, pole dancing, lap dancing, peep shows
- Pornography/online selling of sexual images
- Trafficking, sex tourism and mail order brides

These can be in exchange for money and things such as drugs, food, shelter and/or protection.

## PROSTITUTION

Scottish Government definition:

Prostitution refers to the activity of buying and selling sex, including women and men, and from on-street or indoor environments.



## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

The Scottish Government uses the term violence against women and girls (VAWG) to refer to a range of actions that harm, or cause suffering and indignity to, women and children. These include but are not limited to:

- Physical, sexual and psychological violence in the family, general community or institutions. This includes domestic abuse, rape, incest and child sexual abuse
- Sexual harassment and intimidation at work and in public
- Commercial sexual exploitation including prostitution, pornography and trafficking
- So called 'honour based' violence, including dowry-related violence, female genital mutilation, forced and child marriages and 'honour' crimes

Scotland's public agencies, health, local authorities, police, criminal justice and others have signed up to this definition and the strategy/policy that stem from it (see Equally Safe below).

## HUMAN TRAFFICKING

This discussion paper has clear links with the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act 2015 and the associated strategy and action plan developed in response to human trafficking which recognised the prevalence of trafficking for sexual exploitation. The Act legislates for support and assistance to include:

- a. accommodation
- b. day to day living
- c. medical advice and treatment (including psychological assessment and treatment)
- d. language translation and interpretation
- e. counselling
- f. legal advice
- g. information about other services available to the adult
- h. repatriation

The Scottish Government funds TARA, a national service which has worked with 200 women between 2018 and 2021. Support is trauma-informed and focused on creating safety and stabilisation for women recovering from their experiences. It includes early access to legal advice, health services and psychological support. TARA can provide safe crisis accommodation and some financial support for up to 90 days and, following assessment, work with women to identify a recovery plan for the next 12 to 18 months. The partnership approach is key so TARA works closely with Police Scotland, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, Home Office, social work services, Just Right Scotland, Migrant Help, Mears, Scottish Refugee Council, and other third sector agencies, to ensure a holistic approach. Staff provide advocacy and ongoing emotional/practical support to promote/enhance feelings of stability and link women into other more 'mainstream' services or educational opportunities such as ESOL or college courses.

## FAIRER SCOTLAND

Fairer Scotland envisions a fair, smart, inclusive Scotland, where everyone can feel at home. It has five high-level ambitions to 2030: a fairer Scotland for all; ending child poverty; a strong start for all young people; fairer working lives; and a thriving third age. It contains 50 actions with a call to everyone to create a fairer, more equal society. It also sets out the ambition for a country where poverty rates are amongst the lowest in Europe, and where there is genuine equality of opportunity for all by 2030. Examples are on the [Fairer Scotland blog](#). This is significant given that economic factors are the main reason that women enter CSE, often linked to homelessness, addiction, or a partner's addiction, or dealing with debt. These reasons still exist for many while they are involved in CSE, and form the barriers which prevent many women from exiting.

Protecting Scotland's Future, the government's programme for Scotland 2019/20 committed to addressing prostitution and included a specific action for exiting:

'We are committed to exploring what more can be done to address prostitution in Scotland, recognising it as a form of violence against women. We will 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 prostitution'.<sup>10</sup> This consultation took place in autumn 2020 with the analysis yet to be published.

## EQUALLY SAFE STRATEGY

**Equally Safe**, Scotland's national strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls identifies violence such as prostitution as 'a function of gender inequality, and an abuse of male power and privilege'. There are four priority areas in the strategy:

- **Priority 1:** Scottish society embraces equality and mutual respect, and rejects all forms of violence against women and girls.
- **Priority 2:** Women and girls thrive as equal citizens: socially, culturally, economically and politically.
- **Priority 3:** Interventions are early and effective, preventing violence and maximising the safety and wellbeing of women, children and young people.
- **Priority 4:** Men desist from all forms of violence against women and girls, and perpetrators of such violence receive a robust and effective response.

The strategy commits to working collaboratively to develop responses to CSE. In particular, it aims 'to ensure that women working in this area are protected from violence and abuse and supported to exit situations where they are being sexually exploited for commercial purposes'.

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10. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/protecting-scotlands-future-governments-programme-scotland-2019-20/page142>.

## EQUALLY SAFE DELIVERY PLAN

The Scottish Government consulted on the delivery plan in 2017 and a significant number of responses from VAWPs and others highlighted the need for 'stronger actions on CSE'. This included providing and funding specialist services to help women exiting prostitution, provide support and advocacy, and ensure women have alternatives to prostitution.<sup>11</sup> The consultation responses indicated that in 2017 many VAWPs and local authorities were asking for more direction and leadership from the Scottish Government on how to respond to CSE, including supporting women to exit.

The associated **Equally Safe Delivery Plan** includes broad activities relevant to CSE and several specific ones:

**Priority 1:** Scottish society embraces equality and mutual respect, and rejects all forms of violence against women and girls.

- 1.14 Deliver Challenging Demand programme to raise awareness of commercial sexual exploitation and build capacity across organisations to address it (Women's Support Project, funded by Scottish Government)

**Priority 3:** Interventions are early and effective, preventing violence and maximising the safety and wellbeing of women, children and young people.

- 3.12 Commission a mapping of existing specialist support for those experiencing commercial sexual exploitation, to better understand current coverage and good practice (Scottish Government)
- 3.13 Consider how support for service providers supporting harm reduction and exit for those engaged in prostitution could be enhanced (Scottish Government)
- 3.21 Continue roll out of routine enquiry in key settings of mental health, sexual health, health visiting, substance misuse and maternity, including RIC assessment where appropriate (NHS Boards, Health and Social Care Partnerships, NHS Health Scotland)

The Scottish Government formed a **multi-agency group on CSE** (MAGCSE) which oversees this element of the delivery plan.

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11. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/equally-safe-consultation-draft-delivery-plan-2017-21-analysis-responses/pages/2/>

## SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT RESEARCH AND CONSULTATION

The Scottish Government's consideration of prostitution, including exiting, goes back almost two decades with a previous consultation conducted in 2004. In 2005, the Report of the Expert Group on Prostitution in Scotland highlighted the need for exiting support and resources to be available as part of a phased approach to tackling the needs of women in CSE – prevention, early intervention, harm reduction and exiting.

It recommended:

- A case-managed approach with a designated key worker to offer consistency and continuity of a supportive relationship
- A clear and agreed strategic basis underpinning the work of the various service components, so that they complement and support one another
- A comprehensive local planned approach – such as police, planners, prisons and criminal justice services, work with statutory and voluntary sector health, social care and housing providers in a co-ordinated approach
- Adequate funding to support the proposal for a coherent exiting process and the Scottish Executive to take responsibility for funding the exiting proposals

This paper reiterates those recommendations.

The Scottish Government issued Guidance for Local Authorities and Community Planning Partnerships in 2007 providing advice and best practice examples in five key areas, including exiting:

- Challenging attitudes which lead to a demand for prostitution
- Preventing vulnerable young people from becoming involved in prostitution
- Minimising the harm and risk encountered by women who are involved in street prostitution
- Assisting women to leave prostitution
- Enforcing the law, disrupting street sex markets and protecting communities affected by the presence of street prostitution

In 2017, the Scottish Government published [research](#) about the scale and nature of prostitution in Scotland, including the impact on those involved.

In 2020, the Scottish Government consulted on how best to challenge men's demand for prostitution in Scotland. It also gathered views about reducing the harm associated with prostitution and supporting women involved to exit. At the time of writing (May 2021) this is due to report.



## POLICE SCOTLAND

Police Scotland has acknowledged the links between serious and organised crime and prostitution. Police Foundation (2016) analysis of police data suggested that organised crime had 'significant presences' in the sex industry 'with business-like structures required to manage brothels in order to ensure maximum profitability and to minimise the risk of exposure to the police) strongly suggestive of a link to [organised crime]' with a recognition that official records did not reflect prevalence.

Commenting to the press in 2020, Detective Chief Superintendent Sam McCluskey said that sexual exploitation was 'highly lucrative for criminal gangs' and that 'people who pay for sex need to think about what they are doing ... They may be responsible for the continued sexual exploitation of a woman and for directly funding organised crime'.<sup>12</sup>

## LEGAL ASPECTS

While women who have been involved in CSE are considered victims of VAWG, there is still a discrepancy in legislation which considers them criminals under Section 47 of The Prostitution (Public Places) Scotland Act 2007. This applies to women in street prostitution where the act of soliciting in a public place is a crime (the offer to sell sex in a public setting, most often the street).

The Lord Advocate's 2012 guidance to chief constables<sup>13</sup> stated that police officers and prosecutors had a 'duty to exercise their discretion in a manner which responds to the changing needs of communities by applying appropriate local criteria'. The public interest should:

- Minimise the impact of street prostitution on the communities affected by it
- Not frustrate the efforts of those providing vital health and support services to those engaged in prostitution
- Not increase the risk to vulnerable people and to communities through unplanned displacement

While the rates of women convicted have decreased, many women talk about the impact on exiting of having such convictions, especially when they have to disclose prior convictions to employers or for education courses.

Even if women do not have a criminal conviction, civil remedies, such as anti-social behaviour orders and non-harassment orders/interdicts, are often used against them, and this also acts as a barrier to exiting.

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12. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-55137400>

13. Lord Advocate's guidelines to chief constables on the enforcement of soliciting and loitering offences by purchasers 2012.

## FUNDING

In March 2020 the Scottish Government announced a new fund: the 'Addressing prostitution as a form of gender-based violence' fund to address harm and challenge demand.<sup>14</sup> It was for frontline projects that support women and initiatives that challenge men's demand for prostitution. This amounted to £100k for 'test for change' pilots. This was to open for bids in spring 2020 but was delayed because of the pandemic.

## SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT CROSS-PARTY GROUPS

The Scottish Parliament **cross-party group on CSE** supports legislation which prevents and challenges demand for CSE, and a change in the current legislative balance of criminalisation, from prosecuting/penalising/criminalising those who have been exploited in prostitution towards a challenging demand approach: penalising those who create the demand (buyers of CSE). It believes the law should support those exploited by CSE to leave/plan to leave prostitution.

The **cross-party group on men's violence against women and children** agreed in February 2021 to take action to further discuss and explore how to support exiting and treat CSE in a consistent fashion to other forms of VAWG.

## FIRST MINISTER'S NATIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL ON WOMEN AND GIRLS (NACWG)

The **2020 report of the NACWG** made a number of recommendations including a call for the conditions to be created for a more inclusive Scotland which promotes and protects women's rights for all women and girls as set out in CEDAW, the Istanbul Convention and other international instruments.

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14. <https://www.gov.scot/news/supporting-women-involved-in-prostitution/>

## COSLA

COSLA has identified women engaged in CSE, including prostitution, as a priority for support given women's heightened vulnerabilities in the context of the pandemic. It has explored how vulnerable women might be better supported locally, including supporting women to exit from CSE if they wish to. The COSLA Wellbeing Board is considering the learning outcomes and potential action from a short-term multi-agency working group on CSE and will report in September 2021.

COSLA and the Improvement Service hosted an event in 2020 to explore the collective leadership that is needed at a local and national level to tackle VAWG and gender inequality. A number of recommendations<sup>15</sup> from that event align with the overall approach outlined in this paper including:

- The urgent need to ensure the safety and wellbeing needs of people experiencing VAWG are prioritised in both local and national decision making
- It is vital that the systems and services in place within local communities across Scotland meet the needs of, and are shaped by, the women and children with lived experience of VAW
- At local level, strategic partnerships need to work more closely together to ensure the safety and wellbeing of women and children experiencing VAWG and more resources are needed to support this shift
- A joined-up approach from both Scottish Government and local government is needed, with a clear purpose and commitment to tackling VAWG and gender inequality. The expectation that tackling VAWG is everyone's business has to be clearly communicated to professionals working across all policy agendas at both a local and national level and support needs to be put in place to enable professionals to meet this expectation

## WOMEN'S SUPPORT PROJECT

The Women's Support Project is the national development lead for CSE. Its role involves building capacity and training. This is done through local VAWPs to improve knowledge and understanding of CSE within mainstream services. WSP established the Encompass Network. WSP aims to share and develop good practice in preventing CSE, in supporting those involved in selling or exchanging sexual activity, and in supporting those planning to exit or who are exiting. WSP has undertaken a number of projects to engage with women with lived experience and through this work has sought ways to amplify women voices in safe and creative ways.

[www.womenssupportproject.org.uk](http://www.womenssupportproject.org.uk)

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15. [https://www.improvementservice.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0022/24376/VAW-collective-leadership-learning-report.pdf](https://www.improvementservice.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0022/24376/VAW-collective-leadership-learning-report.pdf)

## THE ENCOMPASS NETWORK

Established by the Women's Support Project, the Encompass Network supports those involved in selling or exchanging sexual activity. The network brings together Scottish agencies which work with people affected by CSE and who are:

- At risk of such exploitation
- Involved in prostitution
- Wish to leave prostitution
- Need support to recover from their experiences

The network supports the decriminalisation of those involved in selling sexual activity, and the provision of high quality, trauma-informed support services which aim to reduce the harm of CSE, provide emotional support and counselling, and support for those planning to exit or who are exiting. It uses a non-judgemental, person-centred approach, accepting and valuing each person involved in selling sexual activity for who they are – their skills, talents, inner resources, coping/survival strategies and future hopes.

The Encompass Network approach works within the Scottish Government Equally Safe strategy, understanding prostitution as a form of gender-based violence against women, by:

- Taking concrete action on prostitution by supporting those who are involved in, exiting from, or moved on from selling or exchanging sex
- Challenging the societal attitudes and structures which perpetuate it
- Disrupting the market for prostitution

It specifies seven elements for short- and long-term planning:

1. Comprehensive primary prevention that supports healthy relationships and sexuality
2. Increased public awareness of the causes and impact of prostitution as a form of gender-based violence
3. Capacity-building so that staff in mainstream and specialist services have the right skills to meet the needs of those involved in prostitution
4. Support and harm reduction services for people involved in prostitution
5. Support for people who wish to leave prostitution, and to help them recover from their experiences
6. Decriminalise selling sex in a public place (Section 46 Public Places Act) and remove such convictions from women's records
7. Disrupt prostitution markets and reduce demand by criminalising the purchase of sex

**“I ended up homeless.  
When I stopped working  
that's where I ended up.”**



# LEAVING PROSTITUTION

*"It's a bloody hard thing to do to exit the sex industry."*

*– Barbie*

"We recognise that there are many individuals in prostitution who are subject to acute exploitation and serious and sustained harm. Some identify selling sex as a pleasurable and lucrative career choice, or as a therapeutic vocation. Our sense from the data that we have collected and from reviewing existing research is that a substantial proportion of individuals (mainly women and trans women) are selling sex to get by financially, given different constraints in their lives around caring responsibilities, physical and mental health, lack of access to social security benefits and support services, workplace discrimination, or other reasons. Their situation is compounded by stigma and managing safety, and many find that the longer they sell sex, the harder it can be to leave completely. **This moves beyond individual 'choosing or 'not choosing' and recognises the structural economic and social context in which choices are narrowed: or in the case of those coerced in to selling sex, choices removed.**"

*– Hester et al, 2019*

# ENTERING PROSTITUTION

*"The way it was described to me it was easy, easy money... yeah. It'd be easy. And it wasn't. I wasn't prepared, I had no idea what I was walking into. The money might be easy but it goes very easy as well. The more money that comes into your hand, the quicker you spend it. I went into it to get money and at one stage I had some savings but they don't last. The money doesn't last. You can make the money but once you're not new anymore, the money is harder to come by. Oh, when you're new, it's basically like you're fresh meat. It's something new for a customer to try and once they've tried you, you're not new anymore. And if you're not good enough, customers won't come back."*

*– Katie, Inside Outside*

Factors which push women and girls into prostitution and other forms of CSE include:

- Poverty and financial pressures
- Debt and loans (including student debt)
- Insecure employment and job contracts
- 'Gendered' labour market with gender pay gap discriminating against women
- Lack of suitable/flexible employment
- Lack of employer consideration of the needs of women with disabilities and with health issues
- Punitive welfare benefits system
- Lack of affordable and accessible childcare
- Women's caring responsibilities for elderly and disabled members of their family
- Unstable, insecure or unaffordable housing
- Previous experiences of violence and abuse
- Previous experiences of the care system
- Insecure immigration status and no access to support/resources because of no recourse to public funds status
- Racism/discrimination against marginalised women
- Drug and alcohol addiction
- Mental health issues
- Perpetrators of serious and organised crime who seek to benefit of profit from the exploitation of others
- Easy access to market and opportunities to pay for or exchange sex

For many women, the complex factors which pushed them into prostitution remain while they are involved and are barriers to deal with when exiting. Indeed, it can be harder to leave than to stay. Any exiting model needs to address all these aspects.

Hester et al, 2019 found that motivations to sell or exchange sex are **largely financial** and that the increased accessibility of the internet has opened new avenues for people to become involved.

A House of Commons Inquiry into Universal Credit and 'survival sex' (when women (mostly) have to turn to sex work to meet their **basic survival needs**, including money, food and shelter) spoke to those with personal, first-hand experience and found that Universal Credit was a factor in their decisions to turn to, or return to, sex work.<sup>16</sup>

In its January 2021 'sex for rent' report, Shelter found that over 30,000 women in the UK had been propositioned by landlords since March 2020 (during the pandemic). The pandemic has meant that many more people, especially women, are facing serious financial hardship making them vulnerable to exploitation. This issue of 'sex for rent' had been raised in Scotland almost four years previously with no action taken in that time to prevent vulnerable women being exploited for the basic need of and human right to housing.

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16. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201919/cmselect/cmworpen/83/83.pdf>

In March 2017, the SNP passed a motion at party conference which included calls to develop 'a Scottish model of legislation that (1) decriminalises the sale of sex, (2) criminalises the purchase of sex and (3) offers appropriate support for those wishing to exit commercial sexual exploitation.'<sup>17</sup>

In October 2017, the SNP passed a further motion seeking to criminalise 'sex for rent' whereby accommodation is offered in exchange for sex. In 2019, Christina McKelvie, Communities Minister said, 'It is absolutely disgraceful that women should have to resort to survival sex, as it is sometimes known – even the term makes my blood run cold for their most basic needs such as food and shelter.'<sup>18</sup>

In 2020, Scottish Labour and the SNP acknowledged the exploitation of women's housing situation and vulnerability. Pauline McNeill, Scottish Labour's housing and equalities spokesperson called for action against landlords taking advantage of the vulnerability and economic situation of women. Scottish Housing Minister, Kevin Stewart, responded: 'The law is clear that no one can be forced or coerced into sexual activity. This would include where someone is exploited through an exchange of sex for accommodation.'<sup>19,20</sup> No one in Scotland has been charged with such an offence, and across the UK only one man has been charged with 'sex for rent' to date.<sup>21</sup> In January 2021 'sex for rent' advertisements were still being placed on commercial sites in Scotland with men deliberately attempting to exploit vulnerability and desperation during lockdown.<sup>22</sup>

## ENTRY AND IMPACT

Research suggests that 90% of prostitution takes place indoors (Scottish Government, 2017a). A recent report for East Ayrshire VAWP (2018, unpublished)<sup>23</sup> includes a helpful summary of UK research findings relating to women's entry into prostitution, its impact on women and their experience of services. This is reproduced here with permission:

*"Routes into prostitution vary depending on the history and life circumstances of the woman. Research points to economic factors as the primary driver, often linked to homelessness, addiction, or a partner's addiction, or dealing with debt.*

*Women experience violence and abuse while working, and significant proportions of women in studies in London (114 respondents) and Bristol (24 respondents) had experienced verbal, physical or sexual abuse in childhood.*

17. <https://ashdenham.scot/2018/04/17/snp-conference-march-2017/>

18. [http://thirdforcenews.org.uk/tfn-news/universal-credit-forcing-women-to-prostitution?fbclid=IwAR05J2k2FKxsYeXhlrW-9\\_xTgpn6-kvg8uGFjGZrR4InbjDivB0ld8YoZFUhttp://thirdforcenews.org.uk/tfn-news/universal-credit-forcing-women-to-prostitution#5qtTa3qur6M8szSL.99](http://thirdforcenews.org.uk/tfn-news/universal-credit-forcing-women-to-prostitution?fbclid=IwAR05J2k2FKxsYeXhlrW-9_xTgpn6-kvg8uGFjGZrR4InbjDivB0ld8YoZFUhttp://thirdforcenews.org.uk/tfn-news/universal-credit-forcing-women-to-prostitution#5qtTa3qur6M8szSL.99)

19. [https://www.holyrood.com/news/view,snp-conference-calls-on-scottish-government-to-ban-sex-for-rent\\_13719.htm](https://www.holyrood.com/news/view,snp-conference-calls-on-scottish-government-to-ban-sex-for-rent_13719.htm)

20. <https://www.landlordtoday.co.uk/breaking-news/2021/1/growing-political-anger-over-sex-for-rent-landlords?source=newsticker>

21. <https://www.insidehousing.co.uk/news/news/man-charged-in-uks-first-ever-sex-for-rent-case-69292>

22. <https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/predatory-behaviour-used-sex-rent-23341207>

23. Improving understanding of prostitution in Ayrshire: a report for East Ayrshire Violence Against Women Partnership and Equally Safe Ayrshire, 2018.



*A third of the women in the London study entered prostitution before they were 18. 30% of the women in contact with a Dundee service for women involved in prostitution had been sexually exploited as children or young people.*

*A third of the women in the Bristol study had been 'looked after' children.*

*An online survey of 641 sex workers who use the internet in their work had a high proportion of respondents with tertiary level education and qualifications, more than half of whom were 'enthusiastic about their job most of the time'.*

*Research identifies a range of mental health difficulties experienced by women who are involved in prostitution, including depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and dependence on drugs or alcohol.*

*Physical health problems include increased risk of sexually transmitted infection, tuberculosis and other respiratory diseases, acute pain and fatigue.*

*A study of women in Bristol who attended drug treatment programmes identified that they were unable to disclose their involvement in sex work in mixed group-work sessions, and consequently felt unable to manage the trauma reactions that emerged as they tried to reduce their dependence on drugs."*

## WHAT MAKES WOMEN LEAVE/WHAT ARE THE TURNING POINTS?

Baker et al (2010) suggests that there are different factors which might represent turning points for women:

- 'Eye-opening' events (being expected to engage in activities with which they are not comfortable)
- 'Traumatic' events (violent experiences)
- 'Positive' life events (falling in love, finding other work or having a child)

These 'turning points' could be a 'culmination of long-term, destructive course of events or like a bolt from the blue'. Others may be 'gradual and undramatic' in which women work at 'phasing out the activity' by limiting sexual services, reducing presence and exposure in sex work, or seeing only their regular customers.

## WHAT GETS IN THE WAY OF LEAVING

*"I was out there probably on and off for about seven years at different times. It was so hard to actually break away from it because it's a means to an end and you just have to do it to get that money for drugs. That's the only way you know how to get money. A fine's not gonna stop you from doing it. That was my only income: prostitution. I had to do it. At the time it didn't really mean anything to me, but obviously the repercussions of it now [are] affecting me, because I'm trying to move on with my life. If I want to get a job in the future, anything, it will be there."*

– Joanne, *Inside Outside*

The factors that prevent women from leaving prostitution are the same ones that encourage them to enter it. The need for an income, or a roof over your head is significant. Thorlby (2015) adapted from Baker et al (2010) sets out the barriers as:

## BARRIERS TO EXITING PROSTITUTION

### Individual:

- self-destructive behaviours and substance abuse
- mental health problems
- effects of trauma from adverse childhood
- psychological trauma/injury from violence
- chronic psychological stress
- self-esteem/shame/guilt
- physical health problems

### Structural:

- employment, job skills, limited employment
- opportunities
- basic needs (e.g., housing, homelessness, poverty, economic self-sufficiency)
- education
- criminal record
- inadequate services

### Relational:

- limited conventional formal and informal support
- strained family relations
- pimps
- drug dealers
- social isolation

### Societal:

- discrimination/stigma

Bindel et al (2012) identify nine barriers to exiting in their study of 114 women:

1. problematic drug use
2. problems with housing
3. physical and mental health problems
4. having had experiences of violence as a child
5. criminalisation
6. the role of money – managing debts or high levels of disposable income
7. experiencing coercion from others to remain in prostitution
8. a lack of qualifications or training
9. entering prostitution at a young age

They conclude that 'obstacles or patterns of obstacles [...] required a co-ordinated, individualised and tailored package of support to unravel'.

Women involved with the Encompass Network have spoken about the different and fundamental influences of money: involvement with and coercion from organised crime and loan sharks; partners and family relying on earnings; and internalisation of their worth according to how much money they make per booking.

Women spoke to us about it being quick money but never easy money, but also how their social circle and wider networks see CSE as a 'good' option, given the other options they consider available to them. Some report a 'skewed' sense of salaries in other forms of employment. Many spend a lot on 'reinvesting' in themselves: cosmetics, high-end beauty products, cosmetic and plastic surgery. Older women tell us that they realised that, after a certain age, their earning potential rapidly decreased.

*"If somebody's been living that kind of lifestyle where they've earned all this money and it's so easy to come by, they actually need some support to get their finances back intact and to come back down to earth, to know how to budget. They need support to do that. They can't just suddenly know how to become a super amazing budgeter; they need classes and they need support to show them, how do you budget? How are you going to make that money work for you so that you're not struggling, so you're not running out of money? They need classes that teach them that. While they are very good business people and they've learnt a lot of business skills, they don't always have good financial skills and they maybe need a bit of help to get back on top of finances and they need that specialist support and help."*

*– Barbie, Outside*

Many women talk about losing their friends/peers when or if they leave prostitution. It can be very hard to no longer be part of what has been a supportive and protective network, and can represent a significant loss. Women have felt rejected and pushed aside when they have exited, no longer self-identifying as a 'sex worker' or being connected to peer groups.

*"All the people that I knew, they're all still in, and very much in. I'm not close to them anymore because once you exit the sex industry you drift away from everyone in that world, even people that were your friends for many years."*

*– Barbie, Outside*

## FACTORS THAT ENABLE WOMEN TO EXIT

*"While the provision of support was identified as key in helping many to exit from prostitution, for some, specific life events were highlighted as a particular catalyst for exiting. These were said to include things like relationship changes, pregnancy and/or child protection issues, seeing peers move on, general poor health and exhaustion, or victimisation or another traumatic event."*

*– Scottish Government, 2017a*

The factors that lead women to leave prostitution vary, reflecting the diverse group of women involved in CSE in Scotland. The range of needs and situations can be complex and complicated. For instance, the Encompass Network has found during the pandemic that more women are keen to exit because selling or exchanging sex is no longer viable for various reasons. Others say that they have no option but to leave because their age is against them: it is a buyer's market, saturated with new and young women.

Despite differences, women have faced common barriers such as the lack of local support services, having prior criminal convictions, alcohol and drug addictions, housing/homelessness, and coercive control and violence from buyers and pimps. Women have reported that the lack of exiting support services available when they need them has made them feel that, even if they want to exit, they are not worth supporting.

Bindel et al (2012) found in their research with 114 women involved in prostitution that women needed formal exiting services to help them leave prostitution and that exit is achievable. They also noted a 'relative lack of specialist knowledge and dedicated services focused on exiting' and questioned the commitment from government and policymakers to support women out of prostitution.

Key findings were:

- Most women who wanted to exit were able to leave relatively quickly when they received appropriate support
- Having a criminal conviction was a major barrier
- Women involved in indoor prostitution faced barriers such as, problematic alcohol and drug use, housing and childhood violence
- Violence from buyers was frequently reported as a motivating factor for women to exit from prostitution
- Providing dedicated support to help women who want to exit was an extremely cost-effective way of preventing further physical or emotional harm associated with their continued involvement in prostitution
- Services that provide support to women in prostitution should ensure that the support they offer doesn't just help to maintain women in prostitution but proactively seeks to assist them to exit and rebuild their lives

This acknowledges the wider factors beyond the simplistic assumptions about individual choice. Nevertheless, Katie describes the importance of services suggesting to women that they could have other choices and would be able to exit, especially when she didn't believe that choice was possible for herself:

*"The nurses from the clinic used to come in and see us. Make sure everyone's okay. It was nice, reassuring that there was someone that actually cared about the girls. You see, a lot of people don't care. People can pretend to care about you but when they're not getting money from you, they don't like you that much. The nurses, they talked to us. If we needed anything to talk about or we could obviously go to the clinic to talk to them. They let us know there was somewhere we could go to. To just think that somebody actually like believed in you – that you were better than that. You didn't have to do that with your life – that sort of thing. It was nice. But at the same time, you didn't have that same belief in yourself."*

*– Katie, Inside Outside*



Sarah Jane describes the importance of having a consistent, committed worker who supported her over a long time:

*"If I had not met my support worker, I would have been dead by now. She has saved my life on so many occasions. Sometimes just by being at the end of the phone, sometimes by sitting and speaking to me for hours. She is the one person that kept me going. She kept me certain that I could stop. She got me out of another bad relationship and into the refuge. That was when it started to change, the cycle started to break a bit. My worker has given me a lot of help and I've kind of realised that I didn't believe that I deserved anything good in my life. If it wasn't for her, I wouldn't be here. She was there for me, when I went off the rails, she stuck by me. She'd still be there for me. There was no judgement there. She has been the stable relationship for me. Something I never really had before."*

*– Sarah Jane, Inside Outside*

The importance of knowledgeable staff is echoed by Alice:

*"They were a bit of a rock for me when it was all too stormy, and I was like a boat just being flung about. It sounds a bit stupid, but they were a bit of an anchor, you know what I mean? They'd helped other girls like me, so I didn't have to worry about what they thought – they just knew."*

*– Alice, Outside*

Joanne describes how a police officer reinforced a sense of self-belief:

*"I met one police officer. She had me in the car, taking me to jail. She was different. I just feel that she treated me like a human. She spoke to me, asked me, "Why are you doing this? What do you think could help you?" She told me about a diversion programme running. She was going to put my name forward for it, I wasn't aware of anything like that. It was just you get jailed and you were fined before that. So the diversion programme really, really turned my life around. It was great support for that. What I would say to the police officer that I spoke to, I would say thank you to her. Just for taking that wee bit of time to talk to me as an individual. To take a wee bit of interest in me. She actually said to me that she had faith in me, that I could overcome this. At that time, it never really meant much to me, but now looking back, just they few wee kind words made such a big difference. It's made such a big difference to me."*

*– Joanne, Inside Outside*

There is general consensus in the literature that important enablers for exiting include:

- Formal support services
- Other methods of earning a reasonable income
- Peer support and supportive relationships

However, it is also clear that as well as different factors behind exiting, there may be different stages which might include thinking about it, testing out viability, safety planning, reducing involvement rather than leaving entirely, leaving and going back.

*"You do become detached and you start to see yourself from the outside but not really see yourself at all. You all just become these numb statues that stand on a street corner, goes through the motions, doesn't think about anything too much because if you do, you don't know how your brain's gonna cope with it. I used to feel like screaming but I thought, "If I start to scream now, I'm not going to be able to stop." I'm going get signed in somewhere and be sectioned and that's going to be it you know? I think there's probably a lot of girls out there that feel like that but some of them don't have the ability to say it, some of them don't maybe realise that's what it is. I would have times where I was like, "Right do you know what, I don't care. Fuck it. I'm not doing it. I'm not doing it." After the last attack, I just couldn't go back out. I couldn't. I literally just could not do it. I thought to myself, "Do you know what? There's got to be more than this. There's got to be more than this, there just has to be." I just knew that I had to get out and if I didn't get out the only way I was going to get out was in a box. That's the stage that it got to."*

– Sarah Jane, *Inside Outside*

*"The women, we never really talked about getting out. It wasn't part of what we talked about. We just had to get on with it. People need to gi' them a chance, they deserve a chance. There's a flip side and they could stop it like that if they got the help. They're doon there making money for to feed their habits."*

– Natalia, *Inside Outside*

*"The pain I felt for her was unbelievable. Seeing that nothin'ness in her eyes that night was kind of the start of the end for me when it came to prostitution. I thought the light had already gone out of my eyes but it hadn't gone entirely. It hadn't gone out in my heart and in my head. I still had a wee bit of life left in me and I knew I had more to give. I had to give myself a chance to be a different person."*

– Wendy, *Inside Outside*



Despite wanting to exit, Wendy found that it was not simple, and could take a long time:

*"I got clean. You think when you're in recovery, you'll get "Well done. You've done great." It wasn't the case for me. No matter how far on I get, it's never gonna be enough. Small town, small mental attitude you know. They all knew who I was and that I'd been a drug addict, working the streets. People who bullied me have kids at my son's school so I am facing the bullies of my childhood again in the playground. They'll be chit chatting, waiting on their kids and I walk in. Almost silence falls you know. I get sniggers, looking me up and down like the mean girls at school again. It's horrible. I was called "black junkie", "dirty prostitute", "heroin whore", in front of my son. It's not pleasant to explain to your four-year-old what a "junkie prostitute" is. It's hard to face it every day. Abuse and hatred."*

– Wendy, *Inside Outside*

Katie also highlights the role of others and elements of persuasion and coercion:

*"I am getting out. I am trying to get out. I want to be able to say that I exited and I managed to stay away. That's the hardest part of it. The sauna will ring and ask me to come back, to help them out. If they said, "No, you're not coming back" then I'll be like, "Alright okay. Ta." It's that pull of money, it drags you back. I feel like I have wasted those years of my life. I have had to fit a lot into it, it feels like time has been running past me."*

– Katie, *Inside Outside*

## VALUE OF PEER SUPPORT AND SOCIAL NETWORKS

Hedin and Månsson (2004) in research based on interviews with 23 women found that 'repairing and mastering previously close relationships' and 'building a new heterogeneous social network' were two factors critical to supporting exiting. This is also a factor in the work of PEERS (Prostitutes' Empowerment, Education and Resource Society) in Victoria, British Columbia (Rabinovitch, 2004).

The Women's Support Project has done some limited work on setting up peer support for survivors which is also peer-led. However, women have been apprehensive about becoming involved in groups because their anonymity could be compromised with negative consequences. They also say that they would not like to mix with women who are still involved or who do not want to leave: the peer support should be exiting – and survivor-focused. In other countries, there are established local survivor programmes and networks to encourage women with similar experiences to work together.



A recent development in the UK is Youmysister<sup>24</sup> which runs programmes led by 'survivors of the sex trade'. Its website indicates the scope of its offer including courses on mental health support, and activity with employers and others to help women move into other forms of employment. There are opportunities for this to be promoted across Scotland, and supported in local areas.

## EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT

The Encompass Network is currently working with the Employability Division in the Scottish Government. It is developing a programme of work with Fair Start Scotland and employability support providers to raise awareness of the needs of women exiting. This will build capacity to respond and will develop joint work at local and national levels. Women have identified the challenges and issues they can face in trying to access employment. The Encompass Network hopes that this new partnership can effect long-term change.

## WHAT WOMEN TELL US

Women consistently say how difficult it can be to leave. Although a few move on relatively easily, most need support, of different types and intensity for different lengths of time.

It's hard to leave:

*"A lot have got a lot of things going on, hectic lives with lots to deal with. They've got a lot of confusion, a lot of alcohol or drug use or some kind of addiction. I knew a lot of women who were sick of it, they were just, 'Oh, I can't - I'm really sick of this, but there's no other way. There's nothing else, so I either just grin and bear it or I get out and live in poverty unemployed on benefits for the rest of my life.*

*I reached a stage when it all started to just get on top of me and I thought, I can't cope with this anymore. I started really thinking about my security and the danger aspect of the work, like trying to be a bit more realistic about what I was doing and what I was involved in, how bad it was, all the worry and stress, and also not knowing who's coming through your door. A few people had been killed over the years and I was getting older too. I was thinking, well, this isn't a job that can sustain me until I'm like 80 or 90 because I don't think I want to be having sex with people when I'm that age. Do you know what I mean? Just thinking, if I carry on like this, it will mean I will always be involved with all of this for the rest of my life. Is that something I really want? >>>*

24. <https://youmysister.org.uk/>

*I had all of this going on in my head and really worrying about everything so it was quite chaotic a lot of the time actually, when I think of it now. I think, bloody hell, how the hell did I even do all that. It created a lot of anxiety and I thought, I don't really want to have anxiety all the time and be worried about all these different things. I felt totally hopeless. I really wanted to get out, I needed to because otherwise my mental health would have got really bad and I would have ended up dead, honestly.*

*There are so many barriers to leaving and staying out. A lot of the time it's like, "Do you know what? I'm stuck between a rock and a hard place and I can't get out of this". As much as I want to get out of this, I can't because I can't afford to because I've got all these bills that I have to pay. The reality of this is that if I don't do this work, I'm going to end up homeless. I'm going to end up with no money, I'm going to end up working minimum wage, and I'm going to end up not being able to feed my kids. Then women are meant to choose. They've gone through so much already and then to have to think, well, in order for me to come out of this, I'm going to have to go through so much more and it's going to be so, so tough. They end up just going, "You know what? I'll just have to keep doing it." And that's the reality of it. They get stuck in sex work because there's no exit to this. Well, not an easy one anyway.*

*It's a bloody hard thing to do to exit the sex industry. I ended up homeless. When I stopped working that's where I ended up. I had to go on benefits but that didn't cover my rent as I was staying in a really expensive part of town. I could afford that when I was working but once I stopped – I didn't have money to pay for myself. That's what exiting sex work meant. That's what happens when you get out. You end up on your knees, with no money, homeless. Do you know what I mean? It's not pleasant. When other women see or hear that you became homeless and penniless – of course they are going to stay in the industry and be petrified to leave with nothing to look forward to except a life of poverty."*

*– Barbie, Outside*

Women need services including practical help and access to trauma-informed counselling/mental health support for initial phases:

*"I think we need services to help girls exit. Not having a job to go to and not having a routine and not having money, and like, that's the biggest pull to go back. It's the practical help that's really important. If a girl really wants to leave, give her something to concentrate on. Something concrete, a route out in a way."*

*– Katie, Inside Outside*

*"I was always lifted for it. I was convicted. Sometimes I would start to pay the fines but I was always in fucking district for it. I 'member when you were in the cells somebody used to come in the cell and talk to you about support. I think that was when I met services for the first time. I think counselling should be available. I think lassies need to speak about it, 'cos I dinnae really speak about it. Now that I'm getting older, I'm thinking you do need to cos it does scar you in ways you didnae realise. You might no' even see it but you're just so used to acting and doin' things a certain way to hide it all."*

*– Levi, Inside Outside*

Women need empathetic staff offering support, advocacy and clear links into services which can address their range of issues:

*"There needs to be proper concrete support for women. They need secure accommodation, maybe supported living at the start. If they need to, get them on a script. Help them make it to appointments and things like that. Different services need to come to the women, certainly at the start. Have lots of stuff happening through the day to keep women occupied, to get them involved. There needs to be staff around during the day and at night 'cos I also know that's it's sometimes at night time, the drugs get into your head and you just need somebody there and then. Most of all you need people who are genuinely interested in helping these women."*

*– Sarah Jane, Inside Outside*

Women need peer and family support:

*"There were times I thought, 'I have to get out of this, I want to get out of this.' I thought about it a few times. When I was walking doon there I was like, 'What am I doing this for? I dinnae need to do this.' Ken? There was a good few times I thought about getting oot, but it's hard to get out. 'Cos you're used to that money. It comes to a point where you come out of it and you forget about the money. If women want out, they need strength. A wee bit of family support. Support fae even a professional, maybe ex-working lassies, somebody's who's been there done it... and left it."*

*– Natalia, Inside Outside*

Women need other ways of getting money:

*"That money – it didn't stay wi' you. Nah. In one hand and into a smack dealer's hand, so they were the ones that were getting the money from it. From the punter to me to the dealer. It never stayed with me."*

*– Natalia, Inside Outside*

*"It's having jobs available for people that they can go into, but it needs to be a living wage, a proper job. That's what they need. That's at least something that someone can look forward to. Honestly, if you'd been working at the level that some of these women have been working at and the amount of money they've been earning and realise you have to go from that to being like, my future is surviving on benefits or minimum wage. The reality of it is that's what they're faced with when they want to leave. Can you imagine going from £2,000 a week to £70 a week?"*

*– Barbie, Outside*

Women need to feel safe and be safe:

*"I look back and think, 'Holy shit you know I could have been murdered.' There but for the grace of God, I'm still alive 'cos situations I was in, the cars I was getting into it. You don't know what they're going to do, if they want to be violent. You don't know what their intentions are. If somebody took me away and done whatever they wanted to me, put me somewhere, it would never have mattered."*

*– Wendy, Inside Outside*

*"With customers, I think about my safety. I have very high heels. They are my weapon in case I need them. I wear them but all the time I keep them very close to me because if something happens with a customer, I have to do something. I will use them. I will not stay there and be killed. I have to protect myself. When I arrived in Scotland, I saw that a Romanian girl escort was killed. I was really, really scared. A couple of months ago, I saw another girl was killed. I was again scared."*

*– Natasha, Inside Outside*

**“I just knew that I had  
to get out and if I didn't  
get out the only way I  
was going to get out  
was in a box.”**



# WHAT WOMEN NEED/ISSUES FOR WOMEN AND FOR THOSE SUPPORTING THEM

The evidence suggests that women need services and support to deal with:

- Trauma
- Mental health and stress
- Current and previous experiences of multiple forms of VAWG
- Sexual and reproductive health
- Housing and homelessness
- Money/debt/low wages/welfare benefits
- Insecure immigration status
- Drug/alcohol addiction
- Stigma, shame and guilt
- Criminal justice
- Trafficking and coercion

Given the above, services need to work with one another in a multi-agency partnership with agreements and clear roles in order to meet such broad needs, but also to advocate for change.

Exiting services also need to focus on safety and on women's own skills and resilience. In its 2019 inquiry, the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission reported 'many users had practical problems such as travelling long distances for appointments with different services, and concerns about having to go to locations where they did not feel safe. Research has shown that exiting service users placed high importance on "safe spaces" and in the way that they were "met and spoken to", and that a negative first meeting would lead to them not accessing the service again. Even after the first meeting, there was a strong negative impact of a support worker who seemed not to pay attention or being too rushed. This is concerning when combined with evidence from those currently selling sex that services are "condescending" and treating them "like I need to be 'saved' from myself".'

The same report also notes the importance of services maintaining confidentiality within the multi-agency context: 'Lack of conditionality and holistic support were highlighted as crucial in the success of exiting services. The confusion surrounding the neutrality of exiting services is currently an impediment to their access: [with written evidence commenting] "A strong disincentive to engage with "exit" services among sex workers is the fear that information about themselves or their clients will be passed on to law or immigration enforcement without their consent. The negative impact on those who might have suffered human trafficking or exploitation needs to be considered."

Research shows many women suffer from PTSD, depression and anxiety as a consequence of involvement in CSE, and so services need to be informed by Herman's three-stage model of trauma recovery<sup>25</sup> with long-term support made available:

**Stage 1:** harm reduction and establishing safety – addressing substance misuse issues; having a safe living situation, stable source of income, and basic health needs met; being able to manage symptoms such as anxiety and depression; self-protection and self-care

**Stage 2:** dealing with healing of trauma – access to specialist emotional and practical support to cope with experiences of sexual exploitation, rape and sexual abuse

**Stage 3:** moving on and exiting – stabilisation or transitioning from selling sex to alternatives; establishing new relationships; taking care of material needs; engaging more actively in the world, recovering aspirations/ambitions; developing mutual friendships; accessing training and employment; renewing family and child contacts; participating in creative activities; learning self-care techniques; and access to other support services in informal settings

## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR WHAT'S NEEDED FOR INDIVIDUAL WOMEN

- A trauma-informed, women-centred approach that is based on an understanding of CSE and its national and international context
- A model that's time relevant: for example, to the environments in which women sell sex, including online; and the current pandemic
- A model that recognises diverse needs and challenges, short- and long-term risks and harm, and the contexts in which women sell sex
- Long-term support. Exiting is a process. Women can take many years to leave (if they ever do) and may re-enter at different points
- Support that is flexible enough to meet women's different needs
- A 'case management' approach with named workers to offer a consistent approach and long-term support
- A combination of core services and additional programmes which can be drawn on depending on the needs of individual women

25. Herman, J. (1992) *Trauma and recovery: the aftermath of violence – from domestic abuse to political terror*. New York: Basic Books.



## CORE SERVICES

These include:

- Safety planning
- Short-term crisis counselling
- Longer-term trauma-informed therapy
- Addictions/alcohol services
- Advocacy for homelessness, housing, welfare benefits and immigration
- General practical support and emotional support
- Peer support and role models
- Links to employment advice, legal advice, and business support and training

## ADDITIONAL PROGRAMMES

These include:

- Personal development and confidence building, including on personal skills, interests and attributes
- Employment support, for example labour market intelligence, CVs, applications, interviews
- Employment guidance, for example into training, education, work
- Volunteering/internships/apprenticeships
- Mentoring/life coaching
- Business/enterprise skills and support
- Literacy and ESL support
- Parenting groups
- Creative opportunities/workshops

There are some examples of exiting models elsewhere in this document below that cover this sort of breadth of scope (see, for example, Ruhama on page 77).





# MODELS OF EXITING

**There are many different exiting models. We have selected a few examples only, from the UK and elsewhere, to illustrate some possibilities.**

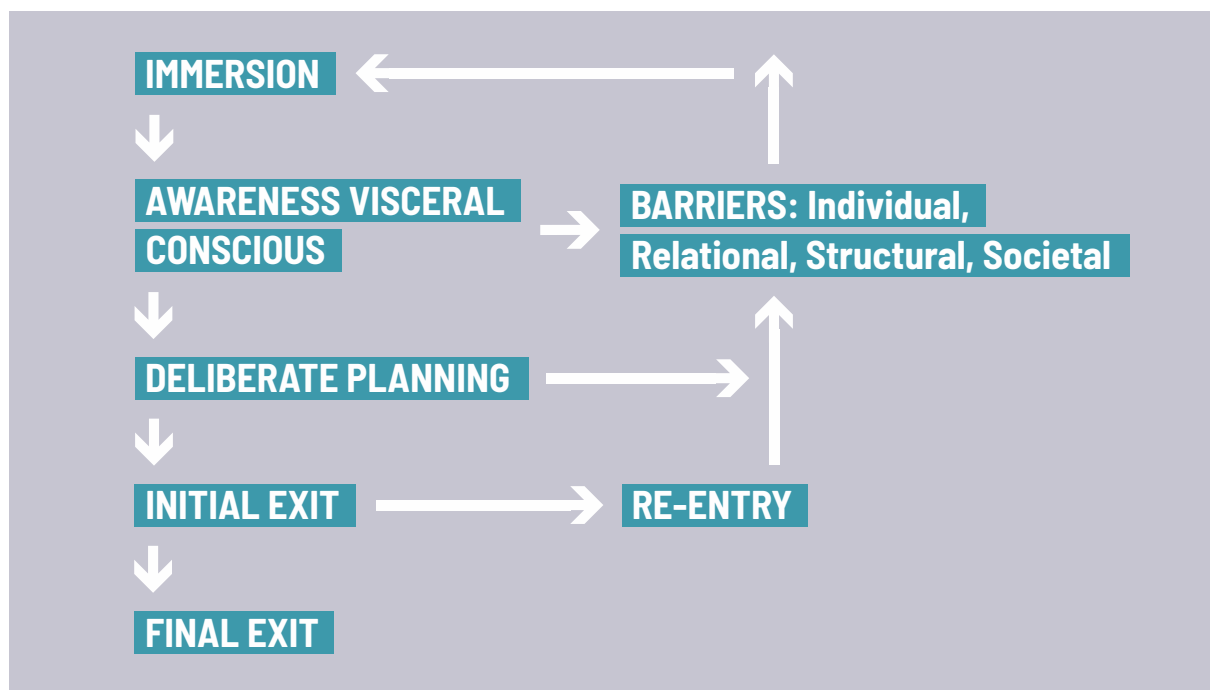
In its exiting good practice guidance, SASE notes the diversity of need but also that some women need more support than others, ranging from very little to high levels of intervention:

"Women involved in prostitution have a range of needs, which can be complex and multi-faceted depending on their particular circumstances. The challenges women face will vary. Research has shown that women can successfully transition out of prostitution without any (or very little) form of support. However, some women face significant barriers and can even feel that change is impossible. Others will be somewhere in between. The provision of dedicated exiting services can greatly increase the chances of women being able to leave the industry and remain out of the industry. The level of intervention needed very much varies. For some women, ongoing and wide-reaching support may be necessary, however, for others there may be only small interventions needed to make change possible. The key role of service provision should be to support women to believe in the possibility of exit and identify the most straightforward path to making lasting change."

– SASE

However, formal evaluation and evidence of what works is limited. Shareck et al (2020), in proposing a design for evaluating **Exit Doors Here**, which is funded by Public Safety Canada to work 'with women to create meaningful changes in their lives, avoid conflict with the law and build a sustainable livelihood', note the difficulties in evaluating the effect on a population of women which is transient and hard-to-reach. The authors say (citing Dalla, 2006) that 'exiting sex work, just like transitioning out of other challenging situations such as homelessness, is not a linear straightforward process; there may be multiple relapses before women exit sex work for good.' They discuss the merits of evaluating the intermediary steps rather than a 'final endpoint'. Intermediary steps that women might need include workplace/pre-employment skills or transport and childcare in order to sustain employment. A longitudinal evaluation of Exit Doors Here will report in around four years' time and will provide valuable learning.

In reviewing models for exiting street prostitution, Baker et al (2010) propose an 'integrated six-stage model that is comprehensive in scope and sensitive to women's attempts to exit prostitution'. Their model is based on cognitive and behaviour change processes (general and relating to prostitution) and the literature on barriers to exit at the six different stages proposed. The authors note that the model's application is limited to women involved in street prostitution, and also that women may return to street prostitution despite time away such that the concept of 'final exit' would need further definition and research.



In asking whether such a model is necessary and the number of stages relevant, the authors conclude in the positive on the basis that, 'it promotes a better understanding of the complexity of the exiting process. It also provides a structure for research, education, and practice. We recognize the overlap among these areas and, further, that integration across all is ideal.'

For her PhD thesis, Hickie (2014) interviewed 19 women who had exited the 'sex industry' and had not gone back for at least two years. She compared the findings from these interviews to Baker et al's (2010) integrated model and found they were consistent 'including the experience of becoming disillusioned with the prostitution lifestyle as a precursor to successfully exiting, the likelihood that women will attempt to exit and then re-enter sex work a number of times before finally exiting, and the presence of specific barriers that inhibited the exiting process'. She notes some additional themes including 'the role that children, customers, and other relationships play in helping or hindering the exiting process, and the development of resiliency among women undergoing the exiting process'.

Because women involved in prostitution are significantly more likely to experience mental health issues and trauma than the general population, in her study of eight US agencies, Cascio (2017) focused specifically on how programmes for women leaving prostitution address trauma and amongst a number of recommendations about service delivery, cultural competence, programme culture and 'aspirational services' says that programmes should offer 'trauma-informed care in all aspects'.

A report by Shelter concluded that accommodating homeless women who work in street prostitution is an essential first step in exiting (Davis, 2004). It highlights the need for a range of supported accommodation for homeless women working in prostitution. It concludes that specialist agencies and mainstream services can meet women's needs by working in partnership. Together they can provide stable environments so that women can get 'intensive and comprehensive support to gain a home, address their drug use, and move towards leaving prostitution'.

An evaluation of the Amari Project which works with women exiting prostitution or sexual exploitation who can struggle to maintain tenancies after leaving emergency accommodation looked at the value of supporting women to sustain tenancies (Johnson, 2019). The Amari Project is supported by a strategic partnership with Commonweal Housing and funding from London Councils. It provides good quality housing together with a trauma-informed tailored support service. It provides second-stage housing for women who can't easily move straight from emergency accommodation to permanent housing because of their support needs. It is a partnership approach involving Commonweal Housing, Solace Women's Aid and Amari. It aims to meet the needs of individuals and demands for accommodation in this group, foster independence and promote stability and a 'good life'. The evaluation, which includes interviews with 11 tenants and other stakeholders, indicates the importance of such a 'staged' model to support long-term housing and stability and the replicability of this as a model. In looking at replicability, it notes that women were looking for meaningful activity, defined as connecting to the local community, developing strong peer support and social networks and focused support on training and work opportunities.

In other research commissioned by Commonweal Housing, Johnson (2016) reviewed the (mainly London/England) policy landscape relating to strategies to enable women to exit prostitution. It followed up previous research. It found that a postcode lottery operated, which impeded service provision. In London, this was partly associated with different boroughs and organisations having different ideologies about the nature of prostitution. It singled out the Safer Lambeth partnership as 'exemplary in seeking to address issues of prostitution' and the Glasgow Routes Out scheme as having 'a very successful pro-active approach [...] which has significantly cut street prostitution'.

Other findings included:

- Prostitution was not seen as a priority in VAWG strategies in a majority of London boroughs
- A lack of national guidance, differing ideological perspectives and the localism agenda were leading to a postcode lottery of support for women exiting prostitution
- In London in particular the lack of a pan-London approach to exit and the lack of any mapping of what services are available to women are significant barriers to support
- There were issues in mainstream services with no routine enquiry or identification of signs of involvement in prostitution, and whether a woman would like support to help exit
- The commissioning landscape for exit strategies was being undermined by cost pressures and the influence of large, non-specialist organisations undercutting specialist services on cost; this had directly led to the closure of one service in recent months
- There was clear evidence of a commissioning shift back to a sole focus on emergency support. In addition to having poorer qualitative outcomes for the women involved, this is not cost effective in the long-term, with the potential for relapse and for women to cycle through the system and a continual transferral of costs

# A MODEL THAT COULD WORK IN SCOTLAND

**Encompass Network services support women while they are involved in selling and exchanging sex, and offers support when they want to exit.**

The focus is on supporting women but services have supported men and members of the trans community too. Much of this guidance is also relevant to them. A few of the services are very small (one part-time worker) with little in the way of designated resources. There is not wide geographical coverage.

Although there has been positive exiting work with women moving on, and notable initiatives on supporting women to exit, this has had to operate in the absence of a well-resourced consistent national strategy and agreed model that can translate to support local responses to CSE as a form of violence against women and girls (VAWG).

SASE proposes a model of 'emotionally intelligent service provision' based on the principle that women are not likely to exit prostitution unless they achieve certain aspects of their wellbeing. However, emotional states differ and so services need to be adaptable.

The SASE model is in two parts: over-arching principles; and flexible provision based on four emotional categories. These are connected to various common themes and trends in exiting and the emotional categories apparent in the pre, early, middle and later stages of exit.

## **More information about this.**

SASE has also produced a 'blueprint for good practice' on exiting which could be the basis of any Scottish approach and how it might operate in a given area. This model works at both an operational and a strategic level, including both service provision and prevention. The Encompass Network recommends this as a model that could work across Scotland with local areas adapting it according to the profile of an area and the mix of services available.

## THE SASE MODEL

**Ethos:** providing a dedicated exiting service that does not see involvement in prostitution as inevitable and recognises that women in a range of circumstances may need support to exit.

**Instability:** offering 'holistic' services does not necessarily mean that every service needs to be accessed by every woman. Instead, the focus should be on what is needed in the specific circumstances. In addition, some issues can be addressed subsequently. Recommended interventions are:

- Drug treatment – women-only where possible as this keeps women safe from exploitation
- Housing
- Help to navigate the criminal justice system
- Education, training, and employment
- Health (including mental health)
- Benefits/finances/debt management
- Families and relationships – rebuilding relationships is often a central component of effectively supporting exit
- Psychotherapy – particularly for women who have been significantly impacted by trauma
- Peer mentoring: caution should be exercised when offering peer mentoring, although some women benefit from having the support of someone who understands and has gone through similar experiences, others may feel that it keeps them involved in a network that they are trying to move on from

**Good lives:** supporting a 'good lives model' of service provision that focuses on strengths, interests, opportunities, and motivations as opposed to simply addressing areas of 'deficit'.

**Lapses and reversals:** ensuring that women are supported regardless of whether they are currently actively seeking to exit or have attempted exit but are experiencing setbacks/have since returned.

**Partnership working:** including mechanisms for sharing information and easy referrals.

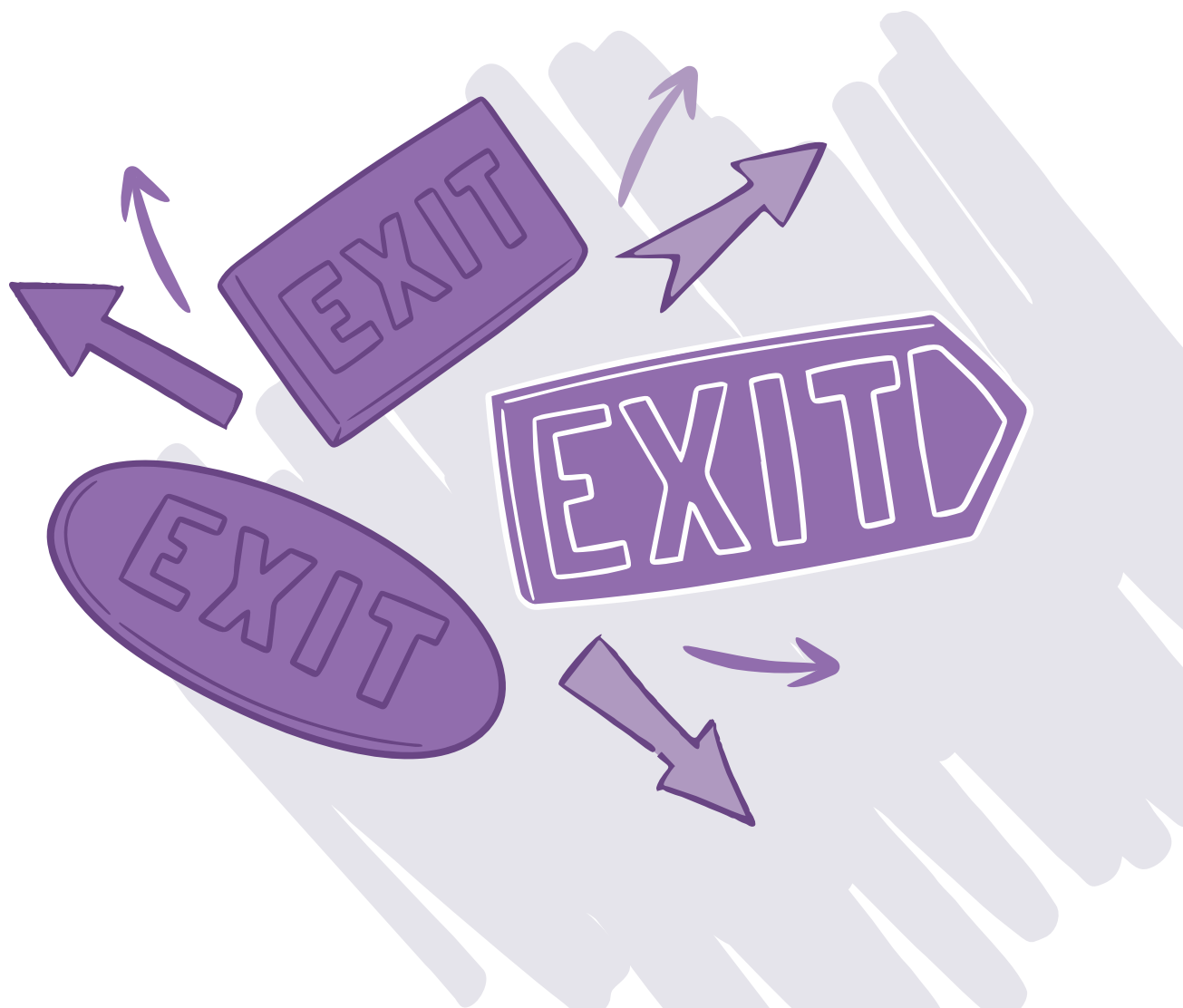
**Case management:** working with women on an individual basis to develop a personalised care plan and range of outcomes, with one dedicated worker who facilitates access to services and oversees the process for this woman.

**Prevention:** linking these integrated and holistic services to preventative work, such as tackling demand and addressing the issues of pimps and 'boyfriends'.

## FOUR MAIN ELEMENTS

The model specifies four main elements for supporting women to exit (access to support that responds to a range of needs):

1. Proactively supporting women to consider their aspirations and the possibility of exit in the context of not seeing involvement in prostitution as inevitable
2. Harm reduction services and support for women who experience relapse and reversals
3. A dedicated exit team that uses case management and tailored holistic interventions
4. A subsequent care plan for supporting women to maintain their new lifestyles



# TAKING COLLECTIVE ACTION ON EXITING

The Encompass Network recommends the following:

## ADOPT A NATIONAL VISION

- Consistent approach with strong national leadership
- Comprehensive, multi-agency response cutting across government departments and other agencies
- Based on empathy and on what women want and need
- Informed by expertise from women/survivor experience and services
- Consistent with long-term prevention values

## AGREE THE NATIONAL STRATEGY

- National statement of intent
- Specify link to CEDAW and obligations to report on CSE
- Specify links to other strategies beyond Equally Safe such as child protection; sexual health and blood borne viruses; mental health; homelessness; employment support; justice
- Specify links to planning structures beyond the Equally Safe Delivery Plan
- Funding from across government departments including for demonstration projects and for sustaining long-term approaches
- Ensure adaptability to an ever-changing CSE market
- Ensure coherence with the outcome of the Challenging Demand consultation and the work of COSLA

## AGREE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE NATIONAL STRATEGY

We recommend that the responsibility for overseeing the strategy and action, lies with the Equally Safe Joint Strategic Board on behalf of the Scottish Government and COSLA as equal partners in Equally Safe. The MAGCSE should develop an action plan which ensures that progress is made and that there is a clear reporting structure.

## AGREE THE LOCAL PARTNERSHIP APPROACH

The Improvement Service is a key support for local councils and respective VAWPs to improve outcomes relevant to VAWG. It has considerable expertise relevant to supporting local areas to develop strategic approaches. It has published a useful guide for elected members on CSE which includes: 'We have to consider why so many of those who may have been involved with public services remain vulnerable for sexual exploitation into adulthood. We have to work to address the lack of realistic and viable alternatives many women are faced with.'<sup>26</sup> It has also published a report on collective leadership for VAWG.<sup>27</sup>

There is already a structure that brings together all the key partners in a local area: VAWPs. We recommend that this work sits within the remit of the VAWPs. However, lead officers need stated commitment at national and local levels along with impetus and resources. If they do not have this, they will struggle to achieve anything.

## AGREE MAIN ELEMENTS OF A STRATEGIC APPROACH IN A LOCAL AREA

### 1. OWNERSHIP

We suggest that, in a local area, ownership sits most consistently within VAWPs which already bring together many of the main partners relevant to exiting prostitution. There is an existing structure developed through the Improvement Service and the VAW Network.

### 2. POSITION STATEMENT

Each local area (defined as a local authority area) should have a position statement encompassing CSE and prostitution consistent with Equally Safe (which they have already signed up to).

Some local authority areas have already done this (most recently North and South Lanarkshire) and others are still in discussion.

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26. [https://www.improvementservice.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0018/8316/EM-Briefing-CSE.pdf](https://www.improvementservice.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/8316/EM-Briefing-CSE.pdf)

27. [https://www.improvementservice.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0022/24376/VAW-collective-leadership-learning-report.pdf](https://www.improvementservice.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0022/24376/VAW-collective-leadership-learning-report.pdf)



**SAMPLE POSITION STATEMENT endorsed by East Ayrshire Council in 2017**

"The East Ayrshire Violence Against Women Partnership (EAVAWP) position statement on prostitution supports the definition of prostitution as a form of violence against women and advocates a challenging demand approach. The challenge demand approach decriminalises and supports those exploited through commercial sexual exploitation (mainly women) and criminalises the buyers of sex (mainly men).

The EAVAWP supports the establishment of a legislative framework in Scotland that is founded on addressing the causes of commercial sexual exploitation and prostitution i.e., gender inequality and the demand for men to buy sexual access to women. The VAWP advocates measures to:

- Decriminalise those selling sex
- Provide support and exiting services for those exploited through prostitution
- Criminalise the buyers of sex in all settings (on/off street; online)

This position is well evidenced and endorsed by both the Scottish Government and National Violence Against Women and Girls Network.

This position statement has been developed on a multi-agency basis, and will also be reported to the Community Planning Partnership Board."

**DUNDEE STATEMENT**

"In 2013, The Community Planning Partnership in Dundee issued a statement focusing on street prostitution which indicated its role along with voluntary and statutory organisations in tackling the causes of street prostitution. This outlined the need to understand 'the wider issues of social marginalisation and gender inequality and recognition of the harm caused through prostitution to women, their families and communities.'<sup>28</sup>

**3. ETHOS AND VALUES**

There needs to be agreement that an exiting model is necessary and has to be based on an agreed ethos and values. This should include that exiting is not a condition for services and should remain a choice. There should be no punitive consequences if a woman chooses not to exit at that time.

28. Dundee Community Planning Partnership – Street Prostitution Policy Statement

## 4. PARTNERSHIP

Partners need identified and brought together in a structured way with a commitment to making changes to service delivery and recognising their role as part of a wider approach. This may be challenging for some. So, there needs to be a well-managed process of consultation and engagement.

## 5. ACCOUNTABILITY

There needs to be agreement about who takes this forward and who they will report to. We recommend that local areas should report to the Equally Safe Joint Strategic Board via the MAGCSE.

## 6. TRAINING AND INFORMATION

Partners in a local area need to be informed about CSE and prostitution, and about exiting. This may require awareness-raising, information and, possibly, training.

## 7. BUY-IN

There needs to be buy-in across agencies. This could be achieved by a chief officer-level statement of intent.

## 8. LOCAL CONTEXT

In order to inform the multi-agency approach, there would need to be some work done on what is available locally. This would not need to take a lot of time as VAWPs already have this information: what services already exist that support exiting?; are they specialist/generic?; is there a specialist worker in the area?; what models (for other work) already exist in the area that might be replicated to reflect that particular area eg urban, rural, or suburban?

There is no need for a lengthy needs analysis or data gathering on prevalence. This work has already been done. It is clear that in any area where there is poverty, disadvantage, other forms of violence against women, addictions, mental health issues and lack of employment that there are very likely to be women working in prostitution. Local areas can assume growing numbers of women involved. Given the expansion of the online sex industry, it is easier than ever for women to enter CSE. Development of online platforms to sell sexual images has resulted in an increase in the number of women involved: they do not have to travel to the cities or traditional areas to sell.

## 9. ACTION PLAN

Local areas need to develop and agree SMART action plans consistent with their overall VAWP strategy and action plan. This action plan needs to fit within local structures and other plans such as those for housing, homelessness, health, sexual health and community justice. It needs to include milestones, measures of progression, review and reporting arrangements.

## 10. RESPONSIBILITY

All local partners have a responsibility to ensure the agreed plan is implemented. This means that it should also be included within their own reporting systems. Full responsibility cannot lie with one individual or agency but must be spread across all partners. Organisations could name a lead person within their own context but it is vital not to leave any individual isolated and unsupported in what can be challenging and contentious work. A local network of named staff could share practice and provide and receive support.

## 11. PRIORITY

There needs to be a commitment to giving priority to exiting support. For too long, women who want to exit have been under-resourced, under-represented and under-served. The pandemic has highlighted huge gaps in service provision and a lack of strategy and consistency. During 2020, women involved in selling or exchanging sex were recognised as a high-risk, non-shielding group but still remain in the same position they were in before the pandemic, if not worse. There needs to be parity of service for women affected by any form of VAWG, regardless of geographical location.

## 12. DEVELOP A LOCAL APPROACH

With these main elements in place, the next step is to put strategy into action.

## SET THE CONDITIONS FOR ACTION IN A LOCAL AREA

What is needed:

- CSE subgroup of VAWG partnership
- Lived experience/service user involvement and links to developing national survivor forum
- Allocated resources from across the partnership
- Commitment to consider specific needs of women in CSE
- Agreed position statement
- Agreed exit model for the local area
- Creative use of existing resources
- Clear referral pathways into services
- Central contact, service and/or designated support project/workers
- Staff support
- Accountability/monitoring/reporting

## ISSUES TO ADDRESS AND RESOLVE

The following issues, which have emerged across Scotland, would need to be resolved early on in the process of developing local work. This list is not exhaustive nor exclusive. Local authority areas already vary in the extent to which they have agreed to respond to CSE or the resources they intend to make available for this work:

- Lack of position statement and understanding in some local areas
- Focus on needing evidence of number of women involved in an area before taking action. There is a lack of clarity as to what is considered a benchmark for action. The end result of this is delay and no action
- Lack of understanding about prostitution and its impact
- Need for training and capacity-building
- Barriers to exiting: individual, relational, structural, societal
- Scope of what's needed to respond holistically to different needs at different phases suggested by cycle of change models
- Aims of exiting: for women to exit or for women to lead the lives they choose
- Concerns from staff about leading on the issue of CSE in a highly contested environment with risks of personal attack

## DEVELOP A MULTI-AGENCY APPROACH IN A LOCAL AREA

- Chief officer statement of intent and leadership
- Include in local VAWG strategy and community plan
- Embed within public protection including child protection, VAWG and adult support and protection

## DEVELOP A MODEL IN A LOCAL AREA

This publication suggests a few models/approaches which could be refined to take account of local areas with specialist services and those without specialist services. There are other factors to account for, such as geographical area.

## AGREE WHO NEEDS TO BE INVOLVED

The following are relevant, and a core network would need to be established:

- Addictions
- Advocacy services
- Apex Scotland
- BAME specialist services
- Citizens Advice
- COPFS
- Children and families/criminal justice social work
- Employers/employer agencies
- Employability advice and support services
- Families Outside
- Further/higher education
- GPs/primary care
- Health – sexual/reproductive health/health visiting
- Homelessness services
- Housing services
- Legal/immigration services
- Mental health services: statutory and voluntary
- Migrant, refugee, and asylum support organisations
- Organisations working with BAME women
- Parenting agencies
- People First
- Police Scotland/community safety services
- Public Protection Partnerships
- Refugee and asylum-seeking organisations
- Scottish Prisons Service
- Skills Development Scotland
- Social work including child protection and adult support and protection
- Specialist CSE organisations
- Third sector support services
- VAWG organisations, especially Women's Aid and Rape Crisis
- Victim Support Scotland
- Volunteering networks
- Welfare benefits/advice
- Young women's services/organisations

## WHAT NEXT?

*"If I was any government out there, I would be feeling terrible. I'd be feeling like I'm keeping all of these people in the same position that they're in because I'm not giving them options. I'm just keeping them stuck in this place with a gun held to their head. That's what they're doing to all these thousands of women that would really not want to be doing what they're doing but they're just doing it because they realise there really aren't any other options for them so they're continually doing it."*

*– Barbie, Outside*

This paper has provided an overview and guidance on how to ensure that women who want to exit can get the support they need, when they need it.

This cannot happen without a commitment to action. For far too long women in CSE have been poorly served. Scotland has made huge progress over the past 30 years to prevent other forms of VAWG, and to strengthen protection and service delivery. Women in prostitution and other forms of CSE need the same consideration and focus.

While we await the findings from the recent Scottish Government consultation, the Encompass Network calls for immediate action. Women cannot wait another two years or more for further reviews, scoping exercises and short-term funding cycles before concrete steps are taken to agree a national exiting strategy and action plan with an expectation of local implementation.

National leadership is required. Given the breadth of the agenda, we believe this should be a joint portfolio between the Minister for Community Safety and the Minister for Older People and Equalities.

The Joint Strategic Board for Equally Safe could instruct the MAGCSE and a reconvened COSLA multi-agency short-term CSE working group to produce a suggested strategy for exiting which is informed by evidence from women with lived experience, especially survivors.

Local responses, co-ordinated by the VAWPS should recognise women's heightened risks and vulnerabilities and all plans should be embedded in local areas' resilience and recovery planning.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

The Encompass Network recommends:

- 1 A national strategic framework should be developed to ensure a consistent approach.
- 2 This should define the core aspects of any local approaches, standards of service and principles of good practice.
- 3 VAWPs should have lead responsibility for developing a local implementation plan to include the range of stakeholders and services.
- 4 Local approaches should take a multi-agency and partnership approach with a commitment to long-term engagement.
- 5 All approaches must be trauma-informed and flexible to address a range of needs.
- 6 Monitoring and evaluation systems for strategies, plans and approaches should include clear targets, reviews and willingness to adapt and change based on outcomes for women.
- 7 Local services should identify a champion or named leads within universal and mainstream services to ensure links to and from services to strategic groups.
- 8 Work on national and local levels needs to be informed by direct engagement with, and participation from, women who have experience of CSE and exiting.
- 9 There should be national and local capacity-building.
- 10 There should be adequate funding and resourcing over the long-term.

# MORE INFORMATION

**Encompass Network:** <https://www.encompassnetwork.info/>

**Women's Support Project:** <http://www.womenssupportproject.org.uk/>

**Inside Outside Scotland:** <https://www.insideoutsidescotland.info/>

**Outside** can be reached via the Inside Outside website

## Stand Against Sexual Exploitation (SASE)

SASE is a charity that aims to create more choice for people affected by involvement in the commercial sex industry and to eliminate harm and exploitation. It facilitates a network of practitioners, individuals, policymakers, survivors, and others who share this aim. The Encompass Network and individual services are members, and have contributed to events and guidance documents.

SASE primarily supports service providers to be effective in helping people, most commonly women, to exit from prostitution:

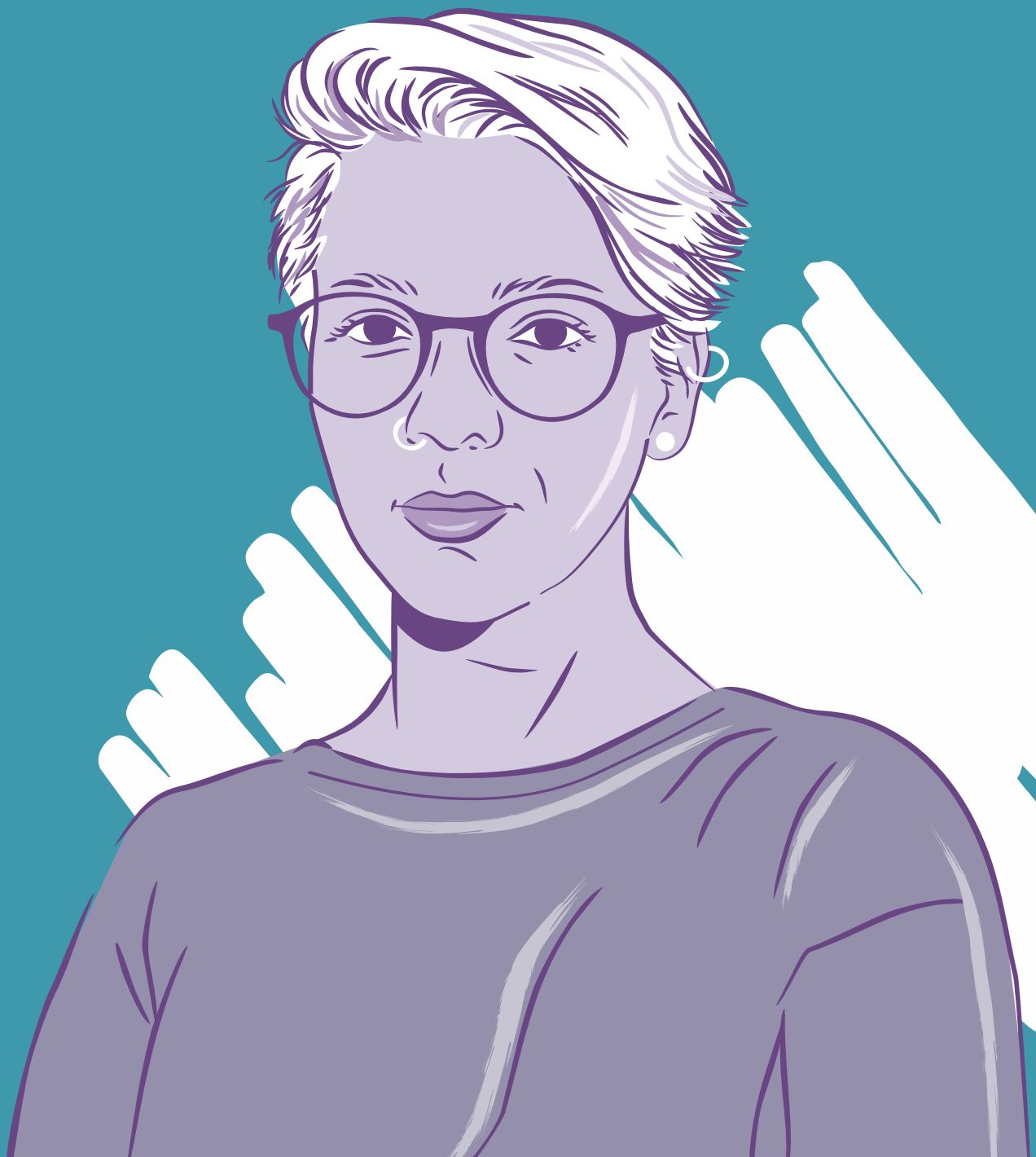
- It promotes practice, policy and law that help to achieve this
- It raises public awareness of these issues and is a resource and information hub disseminating research, policy and practice
- It offers a safe and supportive space for survivors, practitioners and others to connect with one another

Its rationale is that there are 'over 100 UK services dedicated to the support of women in prostitution, but the services they provide are often patchy and lack the resources and ability to provide long-term changes for women'. To tackle this issue SASE works to bring charities, service providers, local authorities and interested parties together to create resources and a unified way of thinking when it comes to helping women exit prostitution. The SASE network supports service providers to be effective in supporting exit from prostitution through practice, policy and law.

The [resources page](#) on its website carries useful materials including exiting good practice. It also lists [UK exiting projects](#).



**“I started really thinking  
about my security and  
the danger aspect of  
the work.”**



# PERSONAL EXPERIENCES OF EXITING

## MARIA

Maria, 27, has been involved in the sex industry for eight years. She started as a lap dancer at university to make money and then moved into escorting. She was frequently asked by customers to have sex for cash while in the lap dancing club and was aware that a lot of the women did this to make more money.

### WHAT MADE HER THINK ABOUT LEAVING?

There were various factors. She began to think about leaving after she was raped by a customer. Also, in order to be nearer to her home, she began work in a brothel. She hated it as it was like a conveyor belt. She wasn't able to choose which punters/clients to see and she made a lot less money so she had to do more shifts. She started drinking more and used drugs every time she was in the brothel. She wanted to leave but there was no work she felt qualified to do. She spoke with the other women in the brothel about how she felt and they suggested she take a break. She stopped for a short time and tried to sell images online but made little money and built up debt. She returned to the brothel but wanted out.

### WHAT GOT IN THE WAY OF HER LEAVING?

- Maria struggled with anxiety. She was having flashbacks to her rape and had trouble sleeping. She was referred by her GP for counselling but there was a very long waiting list. She was not comfortable disclosing her involvement in the sex industry to her GP or counsellor
- She had very low self-esteem and confidence and believed she would never be able to leave. The brothel owner also told her this, saying she was one of his top earners
- She didn't know any women who had successfully exited and managed to build a career, and there was no peer support for women in her area
- She had not disclosed her involvement to her friends or family and felt very isolated. An ex-partner knew but they threatened to tell her family and friends
- She was worried that if she started work, the employer would find out about her past and she would lose her job
- She was also concerned that a former punter/client might recognise her or that online images might become public

- She was in private rented accommodation which was very expensive. She had a long-term lease
- She had not been able to build up savings
- The prospect of having to register for benefits and explain what she had been doing intimidated her
- She didn't know how she would cope with no money while she waited for a first (benefit or work) payment
- She had a long gap in employment with no record of what she was doing in that time
- She didn't have a CV or references
- She had never had a job interview nor applied to a job advertisement
- She had been studying to be a social worker and wanted a job supporting other mothers/women
- She didn't have any family support with childcare
- Jobs that fit around childcare were hard to find in her area
- She googled exiting services and found a project in the central belt but none in her area
- She spoke with two organisations which said they were not able to help her exit

## WHAT HELPED HER MOVE ON?

- She spoke to a local advice service suggested by another woman about her money concerns. They helped her to make arrangements to repay debts
- They referred her to housing services to register for social housing
- She did not disclose her involvement in prostitution to this agency
- She found a chatline and managed to speak briefly to a worker who followed up with 1-1 support and an individual plan. They referred her into a local rape crisis service and helped her get support with her substance use
- They helped her find extended childcare

## WHERE IS SHE NOW?

Maria is on benefits and has completed her university studies, studying part-time and online.

## LESSONS LEARNED FOR DEVELOPING AN EXITING MODEL

Maria's experience shows the need for:

### Strategic approach

- A local plan/strategy that outlines responsibilities and accountability. All services that are involved in support and advice work need to be aware of CSE and its impact on women
- Training across sectors and settings to ensure all staff are aware of CSE
- Clear referral pathways between agencies with respect for women's need for confidentiality and anonymity
- Creative partnerships with local business, volunteer organisations and employers to consider practical steps for training, work experience and placements

### Individual response

- Access to a specialist worker or service for support, advocacy and care planning – short and long-term
- Access to trauma-informed support
- Services tailored to her individual issues and concerns, including practicalities such as childcare and housing

## BELLA

Bella, 30, has been selling sex on and off for ten years. When she was 18, she met an older man called Craig, and moved in with him shortly after meeting him.

Craig drank a lot and used drugs. Bella started a course in college but stopped as he didn't want her to do it. She lost contact with her friends and family. Craig told her how much she was costing him and made her feel guilty that she wasn't making money to support them both.

Craig had parties and people in the house nearly every night. One night he made her have sex with two men for money. This became a common occurrence. If Bella didn't agree, he beat her up. She started to drink more heavily to cope. Craig pressured her to shoplift and she was arrested and charged. She received a fine but worried she would end up with a criminal record.

Craig took pictures of Bella and put them on to Adultworks where men paid to see them. He said they would need to make more money and then advertised her as selling sex. Bella saw men in her own house, with Craig taking the money. He also drove her to men's houses and hotels and waited for her. He promised that they would move to a better area when there was more money.

### WHAT KEPT HER INVOLVED IN PROSTITUTION?

- Little support and contact with her family and friends
- Isolated and controlled by her partner
- Not linked in with local services
- No money of her own and no savings

### WHAT LED HER TO WANT TO LEAVE?

- She wanted out for a long time and dreamt of being a beautician
- She always wanted children but Craig refused. Her younger sister had a baby and Bella wanted more contact with her family and to get to know her niece
- Craig said she would have to work more to bring in the money as he had spent all their savings: he wanted a new car
- Bella realised that he would never let her stop
- Craig was arrested for drug dealing and Bella decided that she had to get out

## WHAT GOT IN THE WAY OF HER LEAVING?

- Her mental health deteriorated after she left Craig
- He kept trying to persuade her to move back
- He assaulted and threatened her when she told him that she didn't want to sell sex for him again
- She had little self-confidence and self-esteem, and no work experience
- She had few friends and social connections
- There was no specialist support in her area so no one was able to support her
- She did not disclose to any other service
- There was a long waiting list for housing and so she moved into rented accommodation which was very expensive and not covered by benefits so she needed to continue to sell sex

## WHAT HELPED HER MOVE ON?

- Bella contacted her younger sister and disclosed that Craig had abused her
- Her sister invited her to stay with her
- Her sister contacted a local charity which met with Bella. They supported her to find out about housing options and linked her with an adviser who helped her apply for a tenancy in her own name
- She was linked with an alcohol service and a mental health charity
- She continued to sell sex to her regulars to get money and build up some savings while she waited for benefit payments to start

## WHERE IS SHE NOW?

Bella is still in private rented accommodation awaiting a housing association tenancy. She is getting benefits and has done some voluntary work with a charity to gain work experience. She is trying to reduce the number of men she sees.

## LESSONS LEARNED FOR DEVELOPING AN EXITING MODEL

Bella's experience shows the need for:

- Early intervention (for example teachers/schools) to recognise vulnerability to exploitation and link with child sexual exploitation (she was abused as a child by a family member)
- VAWG services to create opportunities for women to disclose CSE within the context of domestic abuse/childhood sexual abuse, and to include needs assessment/care planning
- Routine enquiry in universal services such as housing and addictions
- Local strategy to ensure that CSE is factored in, for example, to mental health, and housing planning
- Housing availability. Lack of affordable housing meant that Bella continued to sell sex despite wanting to exit

## DONNA

Donna, 40, has been selling sex on and off for ten years. She has taken breaks from time to time and worked in call centres. She was a hairdresser for years but an accident damaged her back and she couldn't continue, or work in jobs which needed her to be on her feet or lifting. She struggled to find a job which was reliable, stable, could fit around childcare, paid enough to cover all bills and was flexible to accommodate her health needs. Her partner left and did not contribute enough to pay the mortgage and bills so the debt piled up. Donna was worried she would lose the family home.

A friend of a friend in an escort agency helped Donna get started. She didn't like it but thought she would do it for a short time to pay off her debts and build up some money to start up her own beauty business. She preferred to be registered with an agency as they dealt with the bookings and practical arrangements but, as she got older, she wasn't the type of woman they wanted: their punters/clients preferred younger women.

Each time she decided to leave escorting she found it too difficult to go from having a lot of money to very little (as a temp office worker). She hadn't saved as much as she'd hoped. An unexpected bill would come in or she wouldn't get enough hours. She would contact an escort agency and start again. She also tried sauna work but didn't like the restrictions and the long shifts.

Only two close friends knew she was escorting. She was worried she would be outed and about what would happen if the school or social work found out. She was also worried that she was sharing flats with different women and that there would be raids. She made a small circle of friends of other women involved in CSE, and they would support each other, meeting up and socialising. One of them helped her to set up as an independent and arranged an accountant to sort out her finances.

Donna has been an independent escort for five years, advertising online, and managing her own profile, social media and bookings. She rents a flat with two of her friends and they split costs. Donna usually takes three bookings a day, three days a week to fit around her children's school days and weekends with their father. She takes extra bookings if there's a large bill, or a holiday or birthday to pay for.

## WHAT LED HER TO DECIDE TO LEAVE?

- Her children were getting older and asking about her job. She was concerned they would find out how she had been making money to pay the bills or that they would be affected if others found out
- She had been feeling increasingly anxious, and finding it difficult to be with punters/clients. She had been taking longer breaks
- She had not been getting the same number of bookings. Some regulars were no longer in contact and she had been seeing more new men which added to her anxiety
- Her physical health worsened and she had to take more pain medication
- She wanted to set up a small business and planned to exit in two years when she had saved up enough money. But Covid-19 came and escorting gradually stopped over February and March 2020

## WHAT GOT IN THE WAY OF HER LEAVING?

- The mortgage on the family home, which she bought after her partner left
- Feeling responsible for keeping the same amount of money coming in each month
- Her ex-partner did not help with child maintenance
- She wasn't able to tell others how she was feeling about leaving
- Although she was looking at information online, she couldn't find much about practical steps or local support
- She couldn't find other work. She wasn't eligible for any financial support and had to spend her savings. She tried to sell images online but this wasn't profitable
- She struggled because her friends from escorting withdrew when she stopped selling sex. She felt like an outsider, and was hurt that once she moved out of escorting, she lost her social circle. She felt isolated and alone without a peer group to understand her experiences

## WHAT HELPED HER MOVE ON?

- Anti-anxiety medication prescribed by her GP
- A friend gave her some of her sleeping tablets
- She saved some money to help set up her business and found business enterprise support
- She found a service which helped her get crisis funds for food and utilities. They also linked her with an employability service which connected her with the business support

## WHERE IS SHE NOW?

Donna has been seeing a counsellor. She is on Universal Credit and has been selling possessions for extra money. She has contacted local businesses to see if she can get a business mentor.

## LESSONS LEARNED FOR DEVELOPING AN EXITING MODEL

### Strategic

- Need for financial support for women in transition
- Need for targeted support relevant to women's needs and hopes
- Need for business support for women to set up micro-businesses
- Recognition of women's potential, experiences and skills in opening up opportunities for training, education, apprenticeships and employment
- Need for programmes which include personal and skills development, and confidence building
- Help to find new social networks and peer support

## URSULA

Ursula, 20, had been selling sex for six months in a brothel in Aberdeen and in different places across Scotland. She was from Romania where her family struggled to make ends meet. She hoped to open a beauty salon and worked with her mother cleaning the large houses on the outskirts their town. One of those homeowners helped Ursula's cousin get a job as a waitress in Scotland, and Ursula loved to get messages and photos from her. She felt very lucky to have such a cousin: she wore beautiful clothes, looked very glamorous and sent money and gifts back for her family.

Ursula said that she wanted to go to Scotland too, and so the same homeowner made the arrangements. She had never travelled far from home but learned some English to prepare. A man came to the village and took her to the airport with some other young women. They were collected from the airport in Scotland, and told they were going to work on a farm. They arrived at a small town late at night. Her accommodation was a caravan shared with five other women.

Ursula worked 12 hours a day picking fruit. She got very little pay, as her rent and travel costs to Scotland were deducted. She sent most of what was left home to her family who thought she was working as a waitress. She kept in touch with her cousin in Edinburgh who lent her money to pay off her flight debt, and Ursula went to stay with her and her two flatmates. All three women worked in a sauna selling sex. The sauna closed during lockdown.

Ursula got a job in a café but the café closed down during lockdown. She was not entitled to any financial support, and relied on her cousin who used her savings to support them. Her cousin had to keep seeing clients during lockdown, advertising on Craigslist. She also sold intimate pictures online. She tried to persuade Ursula to do this too. But Ursula didn't want to as she was worried other people would see them.

When the sauna reopened, her cousin went back but there were fewer men, meaning a lot less money. Ursula managed to get crisis funds from a support agency for electricity and food vouchers. The three other women started to work for a Romanian man who took them to another flat to see clients. He also took them away for days to other towns.

Ursula struggled to get work. She had no money and wanted to repay her cousin, pay her share and also send money to her family. The Romanian man told her she could make lots of money selling sex. He arranged for her to get photos done and her cousin wrote her profile. He arranged for some men to have sex with her for free to get positive reviews on a punter review site to boost her popularity and get bookings. She had to pay for the photos, her adverts, a management fee to the man, and her share of rent in a brothel. The man, or his associates, collected their money every day after the last punter. Different women used the flat when Ursula and her flatmates were not there. Ursula went to the flat four days a week. She also went to other cities.



## WHAT MADE HER THINK ABOUT LEAVING?

- The threat of violence plus worry that her family would find out
- Her cousin told her about some other women who were raped by some of the boss's associates to teach them a lesson for getting poor reviews on a punter site. She worried what would happen if she got a poor review
- The men were storing drugs in the flat and Ursula was terrified there would be a raid and she would be arrested
- The men had also started to come to the women's home late at night to drink and take drugs. She didn't feel safe
- She hated her situation

## WHAT HELPED HER MOVE ON?

- Ursula spoke with an adviser at the sexual health clinic when she was getting a check up and said she wanted out
- The clinic put her in touch with a specialist service
- The service allocated a case worker, who worked out a plan with her and steps she could take. This included registering with a GP, applying for housing, and looking at her skills/options for employment
- The GP prescribed medication for anxiety and referred her for counselling
- Her case worker helped her to find an ESOL class to help with her English and funding to pay off some debts
- The worker met with Ursula once a week for support and was available at other times if she needed to talk
- Ursula opened a saving account and started paying as much as she could into it

## WHAT GOT IN THE WAY OF HER LEAVING?

- Although her English was improving, she wasn't confident speaking to services
- She was confused by all the people she had to talk to and didn't want to have to tell people that she was involved in prostitution
- The long waiting lists for counselling put her off
- She looked for other work but there were few opportunities
- She started various part-time jobs but went back to selling sex because they didn't pay enough to cover rent, bills and money for her family
- Her self-confidence was low and she thought that selling sex was her only option
- She spoke to her cousin and flatmates about how she was feeling and that she wanted to exit but they were unsupportive, asking if they thought she was better than them and how was she going to make enough money in a regular job. Her cousin changed towards her
- Ursula felt isolated as she couldn't tell people what she was doing but couldn't talk to her flatmates about leaving

## WHERE IS SHE NOW?

The Romanian man was angry when he found out she wanted to leave and threatened her. She told her caseworker who helped her get safe accommodation. Ursula did not tell her cousin where she was going in case she told the Romanian man. She hasn't told her family where she is so her cousin can't find out. Ursula still tries to send money to her family. She escorts a couple of times a month. She places her own adverts on sites. She is claiming benefits, attending ESOL classes and working on gaining a qualification.

## LESSONS LEARNED FOR DEVELOPING AN EXITING MODEL

### Strategic

- Recognition that exiting can take a long time with women returning many times before they leave fully (if at all)
- In areas where there are specialist services, promotion/communication strategy to ensure that women and services know about these and how to refer
- Clear referral pathways between services to avoid women having to repeat information, and avoid re-traumatisation

### Operational

- Local services and staff need to be aware of CSE and its effects so if a woman discloses, they understand what's happening and can meet the woman's needs
- Safe accommodation
- Peer groups or new social networks for women outside the sex industry



**“There needs to be proper concrete support for women. They need secure accommodation, maybe supported living at the start.”**



# EXAMPLES OF EXITING PROJECTS/MODELS

## RUHAMA

Based in Dublin and founded in 1989, at December 2019 Ruhama reported an annual income of £931,914 raised from a combination of public funds including for anti-trafficking, health, drugs and alcohol, and European Social Fund (for an employment initiative).

It began as a small project working with women involved in street prostitution in Dublin. Although there are still women in on-street prostitution, the numbers have declined over the years and most prostitution now takes place indoors in apartments, hotels and brothels masquerading as massage parlours. There are approximately 1,000 women in prostitution in Ireland, with the overwhelming majority being migrants and a significant number trafficked to, or within, Ireland.

The project provides direct services for women affected by prostitution and sex trafficking; and also works at government/societal level to raise awareness, improve the public response and reduce prevalence.

Direct services include housing and welfare work; education, development and therapies; and an ESF-funded Bridge to Work programme. In combination, these also 'enhance exit pathways for women involved in prostitution'. In 2019 it worked with 415 women from 44 nationalities.

Ruhama's ethos is that prostitution and sex trafficking are 'forms of violence against women and girls and pernicious violations of their human rights' – consistent with the Scottish Government's view.

Its approach encompasses 11 elements which make up the overall service, which it describes as holistic and person-centred. These elements suggest the components of an exiting model and which agencies might be involved. For example:

- Guidance counselling (careers and education)
- English language and English literacy skills
- Maths/numeracy skills
- IT skills
- Study skills and study support
- Education grants
- Third-level preparation
- Career guidance counselling
- Interview skills
- CV and cover letter design and development
- Support with course and job applications
- Professional coaching

- Skills development (literacy, language, IT)
- Job search/employability including work placements

The Bridge to Work Programme organises work placements in different industries for women affected by prostitution and sex trafficking. Women accepted onto the programme are given the chance to gain some practical on-the-job work experience, and are supported along the way by the programme coordinator. The programme helps women to build up their CV, their contacts and their confidence, so that they can plan their career.

- Personal development: confidence building courses
- Individual casework

In its latest annual report, it comments that many of the women who come to the project want to leave prostitution. 'We work with them to meet their needs and explore alternatives in a safe, non-judgemental environment'.

It specifies 'what is needed to afford women real choice' as:

- Regularisation of immigration status for undocumented women
- Priority access to safe, secure and affordable accommodation
- Further education and training opportunities
- Access to financial aid to allow a transition out of prostitution
- Access to holistic health services across the country

More information at: <https://www.ruhama.ie/>



## BEYOND THE STREETS

Beyond the Streets is a UK charity working to end sexual exploitation. It has been running since 1999. It is funded through a combination of trusts and grants; donations; training and affiliate income; and contracts. It describes itself as run by women, for women (over 18).

It 'creates routes out' through direct work with women. It has two main strands: 'Beyond Support'; and 'Door of Hope'. The latter is for women in the Tower Hamlets area of London who are involved in street prostitution.

The Beyond Support service is funded by Big Lottery and has three elements:

- **Working together:** fostering collaborative partnerships with individuals affected by prostitution and providing opportunities to participate in the provision of support services
- **Offering alternatives:** increasing the number, quality and effectiveness of projects that work directly with women, men and children affected by prostitution
- **Changing attitudes:** raising awareness of the issues relating to prostitution and ensuring that the needs of those being exploited are adequately represented in the public arena

Its exiting model is based on supporting women who phone them, and then linking them into a network of support provided by its partner agencies. Its value base is that every woman deserves a compassionate response and it tries to provide that through its network of affiliated charities. It recognises that prostitution is 'easy to get into but not to leave because of the "crushing combination" of debt, coercion, insecure housing and drug/alcohol issues.' It uses Herman's three-stage trauma model, adapted and bases its understanding on Baker et al (2010) barriers, adapted. It acknowledges the coping strategies that women use to stay in prostitution because 'change is hard' and it can be easier to cope (for example substance use) than change. It recognises that change is not linear and that support needs to be sensitive and appropriate to be effective.

Its 2016 'Good practice guide for local community organisations working with those by offering support and routes out' is a step-by-step guide to setting up and developing a project. It is primarily aimed at its affiliated projects, and practitioners supporting those involved in prostitution. It reinforces the need for good practice standards in developing projects and the impact of not doing so

More information: <https://beyondthestreets.org.uk>

# SUPPORTING WOMEN TO EXIT PROSTITUTION: EXCERPT FROM SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT 'CHALLENGING DEMAND' CONSULTATION

## BARRIERS TO EXIT

The needs of women seeking to exit prostitution can be complex and varied.

From the 2017 Scottish Government research,<sup>29</sup> the main reasons given as barriers to women exiting prostitution, as told by support services, were financial reasons and a lack of choice, with poverty being the main driver. The lack of alternatives with a similar perceived earning potential as prostitution can make the cycle for women particularly difficult to break.

An extended period of involvement in prostitution was also cited during research, as a barrier to exit. Exiting would involve leaving networks and friendships and resulting in a possible feeling of isolation.

Mental health problems, including pre-existing conditions, were also noted as posing a barrier to exit for women involved in prostitution. 'Self-medication' through drugs alcohol or a combination of both in relation to mental health problems could lead to chaotic substance use and riskier sexual practices. This combination was identified by interviewees as having the potential to lead to more trauma and deterioration in mental health, which could be difficult to recover from and to exit.

## DISCLOSURE OF CONVICTIONS

A criminal record and previous convictions, often for minor offences, can also pose as a barrier to exit by restricting forms of alternative employment. This may be due to concerns about disclosure, fear of exposure and worry as to how to explain employment gaps.

The National Strategy for Community Justice firmly supports the view that people with convictions can turn their lives around, and recognises that to do so they often need opportunities and support.

29. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/equally-safe-consultation-challenging-mens-demand-prostitution-working-reduce-harms-associated-prostitution-helping-women-exit/pages/9/>

It is also known that employment is one of the essential components for an individual's reintegration back into society. However, employers are often apprehensive about employing someone with a previous conviction and as such, many people face difficulties in having to disclose a previous conviction when looking for a job.

The consequences of having to self-disclose previous offending behaviour for long periods of time and for such information to be included on a basic disclosure certificate can have an ongoing impact on people's ability to gain employment, attend university or college, volunteer, secure an apprenticeship or get insurance or a bank account, etc.

It is the **Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974**, ("the 1974 Act"), which provides certain rules governing whether people with convictions are required to tell others about those convictions.

It has been argued for some time that the disclosure periods under the 1974 Act were too long, the legislation was too complicated and therefore poorly understood and, as a result, not properly applied in practice.

**Part 2 of the Management of Offenders (Scotland) Act 2019**, ("the 2019 Act"), reforms the 1974 Act so that it achieves a more appropriate balance between the rights of people not to disclose their previous offending behaviour and to move on with their lives while ensuring the rights of the public to be protected are effectively maintained (e.g. the disclosure period for a fine will be reduced from 5 years to 12 months and the disclosure period for an admonishment will be reduced from 5 years to zero).

The provisions also increase clarity and make the legislation more accessible to those required to understand it. Part 2 of the 2019 Act will:

- Reduce the period of disclosure for the majority of sentences
- Bring more people within the scope of the protections under the 1974 Act
- Provide an enabling power to bring forward regulations to create an independent review mechanism for certain sentences greater than 48 months
- Increase the clarity and accessibility of the legislation
- Change the terminology used within the legislation to reduce confusion about the purpose of disclosure

In relation to higher-level disclosures, a prostitution offence under section 46 of the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 ("the 1982 Act") is not included in either schedule A1 or B1 of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exclusions and Exceptions)(Scotland) Order 2013 or the equivalent schedule 8A or 8B of the Police Act 1997. This means that if a woman is convicted of such an offence under section 46 of the 1982 Act it will become a protected conviction as soon as it is spent. A protected conviction will not be disclosed in a higher-level disclosure certificate issued by Disclosure Scotland and will not be required to be self-disclosed if asked. This will be an aid for those convicted of such an offence to gain employment and help them move away from prostitution without having to worry about the stigma of having to disclose their previous conviction(s). It will also allow those individuals, who wish to undertake roles in the caring profession to be able to, without having to disclose any convictions under section 46 of the 1982 Act.



## SUPPORTING WOMEN TO EXIT

A longer-term approach is adopted by many support services, acknowledging the complex journeys women face when exiting prostitution, including the possibility of returning to prostitution at times of financial hardship or relapses into drug dependency.

Evidence of success offered by third sector support organisations included giving women the opportunities to make informed choices, improvements in safety, quality of life more generally, and to increase options available, enabling them to eventually move out of prostitution.

For some women involved in prostitution, support services are key to their exit but for others, exit is driven by other events. The Scottish Government Research published in 2017, heard from a number of respondents in the NHS and third sector, who described the positive and negative life events that lead to women exiting. Some of these were identified as:

- Rape or sexual assault or other traumatic event
- General poor health and exhaustion, for women with complex needs
- Seeing peers moving on and having a positive example
- Meeting a partner and settling in a relationship
- Pregnancy and or child protection issues

## AVAILABILITY OF SERVICES

Services vary by area. The 2017 Scottish Government research heard from respondents that more could be done in regards to preventing women becoming involved in prostitution, as well as halting an escalation of problems.

Some local authority respondents who were interviewed detailed specific gaps in provision including in mental health services and specialist psychological support. It was also suggested that more could be done in relation to employability services and in terms of the extension and greater use of diversionary criminal justice approaches.

The need for a holistic service to address the complex needs of women involved in prostitution, is necessary to reduce harms and support them to exit.

Support organisations emphasise the multiple needs of support for women involved in prostitution, consider prostitution to be a symptom of wider issues as opposed to the cause. Support services or pathways for referral can be necessary for trauma, mental health needs, economic hardship and addictions.

The stigma of disclosing involvement in general or mainstream organisations has been reported to be significant and may lead to women choosing not to disclose their involvement in prostitution. This presents a barrier for women engaging with required support services.

When registering with specialist support services, there can also be a reluctance from women due to privacy concerns to engage with services where they are required to provide personal information, including their name, address or date of birth.

For women involved in prostitution, flexibility of support is essential, including provision of out of hours and weekend support.

A trauma-informed service would also benefit the support offered to women, allowing for empathy and understanding of potential trauma experienced and complex needs.

Some respondents to the 2017 Scottish Government research noted that women involved in prostitution often accessed non-specialist services first, including those supporting women experiencing domestic abuse and alcohol problems. Women may choose to engage with non-specialist support services to prevent disclosure of their involvement in prostitution due to stigma. It was suggested that improved opportunities could be created in terms of women involved in prostitution who are accessing non-specialised support services.

There was also concern raised by interviewees about women not being offered appropriate support, often due to non-disclosure, or possibly due to questions not being asked by those administering mainstream services, including GPs and social work departments.

Some respondents suggested that a more consistent approach to asking the question of "are you involved in prostitution?" in appropriate settings, would allow for better provision of support, as well as increased understanding of the scale and nature of prostitution in Scotland.

In relation to offering services, a number of organisations voiced concerns around short-term funding cycles. It was viewed as problematic, due to organisations inability to complete long-term planning and the time and resources that are allocated to securing funding.

Short-term funding also proved a barrier to women trying to exit prostitution, as it made it difficult for service providers to assure them of longer-term support.

## QUESTIONS

**Question 6.** How can the different needs of women involved in prostitution (in terms of their health and wellbeing) be better recognised in the provision of mainstream support?

**Question 7.** In your opinion, drawing on any international or domestic examples, what programmes or initiatives best supports women to safely exit prostitution?

**Question 8.** Support services are primarily focused within four of Scotland's main cities – Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow – how can the needs of women throughout Scotland who are engaged in prostitution be met, noting that prostitution is not solely an urban issue?

**Question 9.** If there are any further comments you would like to make, which have not been addressed in the questions above, please use the space below to provide more detail.

More at: [Equally Safe: challenging men's demand for prostitution: consultation, September 2020.](#)

**“If I was any government out there, I would be feeling terrible. I’d be feeling like I’m keeping all of these people in the same position that they’re in because I’m not giving them options. I’m just keeping them stuck in this place with a gun held to their head.”**

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**“I wasn’t prepared,  
I had no idea what  
I was walking into.”**





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

Encompass is managed by the Women's Support Project.

