



Press Release

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LIVING IN COMMUNITY HOSTS FORUM ON BEST PRACTICES IN SEX WORK SERVICES, POLICING AND POLICY

Today, Thursday, June 2, Living in Community (LIC) hosted a forum entitled, Collaboration in Action: Best practices in Sex Work Services, Policy and Policing, the first of its kind in Canada. While other conferences have addressed best practices in working with addiction, housing and mental health services, there have been few events addressing best practices around the polarizing and complex issue of sex work. The event brought together over 60 sex workers, sex work support organizations, police, municipal and provincial governments and other community groups from across the Lower Mainland who are grappling with sex work issues and implementing innovative and collaborative approaches that are contributing to greater health and safety.

Sex workers in Canada experience significantly higher levels of violence, discrimination and stigmatization than any other population of women. Sex work is also a highly controversial issue with many conflicting perspectives, and based on what was heard today there is an agreed upon need to embrace a collaborative approach that focuses on health and safety for everyone and moves beyond moral debates.

“We believe that collaboration between groups who have historically been in conflict is the only way forward to ensure sex workers and all community members are safer, including children and youth,” Patricia Barnes, Executive Director of the Hastings North BIA, and co-chair of LIC said. “LIC knows that the solutions to the harms surrounding sex work cannot be found solely through the legal system. We saw today how powerful cross-sector conversations can be in moving this issue forward.”

“What I saw today was an overwhelming readiness to learn about each sectors’ challenges and issues, and a commitment to work collaboratively towards creative, responsive solutions. It is critical that we find new collaborative approaches that work beyond municipal and jurisdictional boundaries and aim to reduce experiences of violence,” Mebrat Beyene, Executive Director of WISH Drop-In Centre Society, and a LIC co-chair said. “The fact remains that sex workers are an integral part of the community and must not be socially excluded nor pitted against the safety of other community members.”

Since 2004, the LIC model has demonstrated success in bringing together diverse stakeholders to create informed practical and policy-level change. It was acknowledged by *Forsaken: Report of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry* as a model to be replicated.

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