

UMBRELLA LANE

SEX WORKER WELLBEING PROJECT

COVID-19 and Sex Worker's Guidelines for a Collaborative Response

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COVID-19 and Sex Worker's Guidelines for a Collaborative Response Leaving Nobody Behind



People who engage in sex work, in all its forms, have lost sole means of income generation at this point, and face financial hardship lending to the worry in supporting themselves, and most often their families at this time. The precarious nature of sex work also means that many will be unable to access the safeguards provided for other workers, such as sick pay and the awaited protections for self-employed persons. Sex workers who are the primary earners and carers in their families, or who don't have alternative means of support, are at risk of being forced into more precarious and dangerous situations to survive. Irregardless of levels of precarity and related financial worry, all of Umbrella Lane's beneficiaries share a sense of anxiety, stress and worry. This unprecedented crisis calls for meaningful collaboration between all sectors of society, and all organisations on the frontline of supporting the most marginalised. Umbrella Lane has been seeking sex worker views on what the immediate and medium term needs, are and have developed these recommendations in light of the response.

Umbrella Lane recommendations for working to support sex workers during COVID-19

- **The financial insecurity of people who rely solely on income generated through sex work needs to be addressed;**
- Persons who engage in sex work should be supported in applying for Universal Credit and applications to access this should be fast-tracked, given that many are at immediate risk of destitution. Without immediate support, people will be forced to work through the pandemic, posing a risk to themselves and public health generally.
- Sex workers should be included in all calls to action related to the most impacted groups in Scotland, advocating for the provision of emergency measures, including financial, to meet basic need. Many sex workers in Scotland are migrant and thus have no recourse to public funds. Many do not register their work for tax purposes due to the transient nature of sex work and the added fear of criminalisation of themselves and their families. For those who are able to find ways to register as self-employed, the income generated is varied and not consistent given the high levels of burnout in the profession. This is attributed, by sex workers, to the stigma directed towards the industry, thus schemes that offer grants based on previous years earnings will likely not suffice. Like many informal sector workers, sex workers often belong to other marginalised groups, including persons with no permanent home, migrants, trans people and people who have experience of problematic substance misuse, worsening their vulnerability at this time and without the means necessary to adapt to government measures of self-isolation.



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- **Crisis funds like the one set up by Umbrella Lane and SWARM** are of great benefit to sex workers but the need is too great to achieve meaningful levels of crisis grants. These initiatives allow an accessible and quick means to provide basic support to marginalised and vulnerable groups and should be valued and supported. However, they should not be the only form of crisis support available to sex workers and other groups without recourse to general safety nets. We must jointly advocate for these safety nets to be in place for the marginalised and those referred to as 'difficult to reach communities', when the reality is that persons within these communities face substantial barriers in reaching and engaging with mainstream services and support.



The mental health and well-being of sex workers at this time is paramount;

- Mental health services and newly designed online offerings should be accessible to sex workers. Sex workers have stated that they feel excluded from many mainstream services and now is the time to rectify this. Reach out to Umbrella Lane and other sex worker-led projects to ensure non-judgemental language and stigma-free provision. Organisations in this crucial provision of services to promote mental health and wellbeing could try sharing some of the social media posts and resources produced by sex worker-led groups during this time. Show sex workers that they are valued, included and welcome.
- Sex workers told us that they continue to worry about approaching other services due to fear of state authorities being alerted regarding potential criminality, or child protection based on the assumption that people who sell sex put their children at risk. This is simply not true and right now, sex workers, particularly lone mothers and those with other forms of care responsibilities, and people with long term mental health conditions, are already suffering the detrimental effects of isolation on well-being. Support a firewall to be put in place between vital health, including mental health, services and any form of state surveillance on sex workers, including immigration and police authorities.
- Share the Umbrella Lane resource on COVID-19 in the knowledge that there will be persons within your network who do sex work who will be too worried to disclose this amongst other communities, deepening their sense of isolation and distress.





The sense of urgency of this situation for sex workers, both in relation to financial insecurity and mental health and wellbeing, was unambiguous in the feedback to the Umbrella Lane Community Survey. Now we ask of you – our allies, networks, organisations, others on the frontline of supporting the most impacted – to join Umbrella Lane in ensuring that sex workers are not left out of the great work being done to support those in the margins during this crisis.

This collective crisis requires a collective response, one that begins with compassion and ends, hopefully even in the long term, in solidarity. !



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Thank you for reading

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to join our community and hear more about our work. You can also follow
our updates at Facebook, Instagram & Twitter

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