

**UMBRELLA
LANE**

SEX-WORKER WELLBEING PROJECT

*Equally Safe
Consultation
Impact Report*

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Hello and a Very Warm Welcome



Three months ago, I was writing an opening statement to our COVID-19 Impact Report, reflecting on the efforts of our Charity and wider Community to support those most impacted by the pandemic, yet left outside of Government safety nets. Sex Workers, having faced a year of financial and emotional hardship then found their lives at the centre of debate, yet their voices, sidelined.

The Equally Safe Consultation, announced by the Scottish Government in September 2020, represented a new attack on the livelihoods of Sex Workers in Scotland. Within the consultation, a narrative of women being voiceless was strategically used to silence Sex Workers. It was a priority that in the face of such an attack on their safety, rights and livelihood, that our Communities' voices were brought to the forefront of decision-making rather than cast further to the margins.

From the moment the consultation was announced, Umbrella Lane did not waver in our commitment to ensuring the voices of Sex Workers were heard and views were considered in any proposed policy or law change. It's difficult to put into words the pride and respect I feel for each Umbrella Lane staff member, volunteer and wider Sex Worker community, who rose to the consultation with passion, resilience and strength. I wonder if the Government expected such a mobilised and passionate response by sex workers and our lived experience led projects.

But of course, when people have felt abandoned during a pandemic by those who are meant to protect those rendered most vulnerable, solidarity prevailed and voices became louder. Sex workers from across Scotland took to social media, the press, and engaged with Umbrella Lane efforts to amplify lived experiences in the consultation process. Looking back, the value of this effort extended beyond politics. Raising sex worker voices was a powerful destigmatisation and humanising process that incited conversation, compassion and connection within and outwith the sex work community in Scotland.

The Scottish Government has an opportunity to lead the way internationally on an agenda for change that meaningfully co-creates laws and policies with people with lived experience, and I remain hopeful that this consultation acts as a catalyst for such an opportunity to recognise and value the citizenship, voice and agency of sex workers, whilst creating effective policies to affect systems change for all women and girls; two important tasks that need not be treated as mutually exclusive.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank each individual for standing with Sex Workers over the past three months in calling out injustice, lack of Government-backed support, and the futile criminalisation agenda that has the potential to exacerbate harm. But my particular gratitude lies with those with lived experience who bravely shared their experiences, at times with great risk to themselves and their families, to ensure Sex Workers were at the forefront of **#TakingBackOurVoice**. No woman is safe, until all women are safe, and this fuelled the incredible efforts of Umbrella Lane and the Sex Work Community over the past three months as reflected on in this Consultation Impact Report.



Dr Anastacia Ryan

Director of Umbrella Lane





Introduction to the Impact Report

As the response deadline for the Equally Safe consultation closes, we at Umbrella Lane are taking this time to reflect on the past three months of persistence and hard work to ensure as many Umbrella Lane beneficiaries felt able to have their voices heard. At a time when our community has been under significant stress from the Covid-19 lockdown measures, we have been compelled to rally Scotland's Sex Workers and allies in order to challenge its dangerous representation of Sex Workers and the threat it potentially poses to the safety and well-being of our community.

This Impact Report provides a breakdown of the actions taken by Umbrella Lane to bring the diverse voices and experiences of Sex Workers at the forefront of the conversation around the Equally Safe consultation.

Scotland's Sex Worker community, which has suffered disproportionately from the lockdown measures around the Covid-19 pandemic having been classed as a highly vulnerable, marginalised, non-shielding group, was shocked by the announcement of the Scottish Government's Equally Safe consultation, with its stated aim of "reducing men's demand" in relation to the purchase of sex.

It is clear from the statements in the consultation's own supporting documentation and the way the questions are phrased that the preferred course of action from the consultation is to criminalise the purchase of sex – most commonly known as "the Nordic Model". We are aware from a wealth of evidence from those countries that operate on the Nordic Model that further criminalisation of the industry poses a significant threat to the health and safety of all Sex Workers in Scotland. Although the consultation stated it was limited to narrow scope of "women engaged in "prostitution", such a shift in legal direction would have much wider detrimental effects across our broad and diverse community. As a wellbeing project, we concluded that it was vital that we challenge any measure with such a potential detrimental effect on the safety and wellbeing of our community. Therefore, over the past three months, Umbrella Lane has taken a range of steps to hold the consultation and its backers to account, and to support and encourage the active participation of Sex Workers in a consultation process that seeks to exclude and silence them.



Although we will not know the outcome of the Equally Safe consultation until later in 2021, we have already seen the impact that our **#TakingBackOurVoice** campaign has had amongst Scotland's Sex Workers and the wider public by providing a safe platform to share their experiences and make their voices heard. This is only the beginning, and we have a long road ahead. However, we also know the value of celebrating our achievements as a small but growing Scotland-based charity. We ask you to support us on our journey as we prepare for whatever the future holds for us and for our community.

We wish to make it clear that all the work listed below took place in addition to the normal services and support we provide on an ongoing basis for Sex Workers in Scotland.



Initial Response and Media Attention



When the Scottish Government’s Equally Safe consultation to “challenge men’s demand for prostitution” was first announced in September 2020 by the SNP Minister for Community Safety, Ash Denham. Anastacia Ryan, founding Director of Umbrella Lane, provided an opinion piece to The Times newspaper beginning the conversation that would go on to surround the consultation. Dr Ryan’s article was based on a solid foundation of academic and public health research supporting Umbrella Lane’s wellbeing and peer-led approach to providing services to over five hundred Sex Workers in Scotland over the past decade. The following month, October 2020, Dr Ryan went on to take part in a televised debate on Scotland Tonight against SNP supporter Suzanne McLaughlin where she highlighted the dangerous consequences of the changes to the law that the consultation narrative supported.

The Scotland Tonight interview was well received by viewers and was swiftly followed by an STV News article. In this, Umbrella Lane championed the voices of Sex Workers as they shared their stories of the realities of Sex Work during the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown, emphasising the need for the genuine voices, needs and experiences of Workers to be at the heart of the Equally Safe consultation.





Umbrella Lane's Consultation Breakdown

At Umbrella Lane we believe that everyone has the right to form an opinion based on accurate, unbiased and comprehensive information. Two principal flaws that became evident early in the consultation process were, firstly, the unclear and misleading nature of the questions the consultation actually asks, and, secondly, the failure to actively encourage the participation of those with the most experience of the issues being consulted on who would also be the most likely to be affected by its outcome. Many ordinary members of the public and Sex Workers alike expressed confusion regarding both the content of the consultation and its aims. In response to these complaints, the Scottish Government released what they purported to be an 'Easy Read' version of the consultation, which provoked widespread anger, shock and disbelief from Sex Workers due to its dehumanising portrayal of Sex Workers and dangerously simplistic characterisation of the consultation questions. Whilst Umbrella Lane of course supports Easy Read as a way to increase accessibility, the graphic depictions of sex workers in the document exposed a harmful view of sex workers as infants with no resilience or strength – **something, we as a Sex Worker-Led Charity strongly refute.**

From the beginning of the consultation, Umbrella Lane has prioritised developing an unbiased understanding of the consultation amongst both Sex Workers and the general public and has promoted the sharing of this information with all parties to encourage as many responses as possible.



We began by publishing an academically-sourced breakdown of the consultation and its questions. Unlike the supporting documentation to the actual Equally Safe consultation, which unfortunately referenced numerous disproven, discredited or simply inaccurate sources, Umbrella Lane took care to ensure the scientific validity of the breakdowns' sources and worked hard to ensure our presentation of the information and questions was free of bias, encouraging individuals to reflect on the issues independently with the support of accurate and verified information.

For additional accessibility, and with awareness that the stresses of the pandemic and its effects were making it more difficult for many people to dedicate the time or attention they might wish to to their response, we also released a shorter abridged version of our guidance.



Umbrella Lane's Online Workshops

We hosted a series of online workshops from the 21st October until 7th December for both Sex Workers and members of the public, allowing people the chance to interactively participate in understanding the consultation with an Umbrella Lane member of staff. Some of these workshops were only open to Sex Workers, allowing Workers a truly safe and inclusive space to discuss their issues frankly with their peers. In total, we ran seven workshops, which not only provided a greater number of people opportunities to attend, but also allowed each workshop to run for a smaller group, which encouraged participation and discussion where both attendees and our organisation were able to learn from one another. **The response from our workshop attendees was unanimously positive, receiving an average rating of**

4.9 out of 5

in surveys conducted after each workshop. More detailed feedback from our workshop attendees included:

'Super informative, thought-out and well-argued. Unbiased and researched arguments were presented, and practical advice for what actions to take forward were provided. Let's make a change!'

'It was a really informative session - I had worked on my own responses, but honestly the consultation itself is a mess! I felt very sorry for the team dealing with a hacker, but just highlights the importance of an inclusive process for consultation. More open voices with integrity need to be heard. Well done, Umbrella Lane team - Many thanks!'

NEED HELP WRITING YOUR RESPONSE TO THE EQUALLYSAFE CONSULTATION?

Don't worry! Umbrella Lane has prepared an online workshop schedule from the 21st of October up until the 7th of December to help you complete your response step by step.

Want to check when the next workshop is and download the notes beforehand?

>> [CLICK HERE](#) <<





In addition to our interactive online workshops, Umbrella Lane also produced a number of short YouTube Videos on each section of the consultation and its questions, not only offering individuals unable to attend the online workshops the opportunity to acquire the information in an audio-visual format but also to clarify the issues and answer the questions raised by attendees in those workshops.

The responses of respected organisations and academics, as well as those of Workers who had given their permission to do so, were published on our website to encourage more responses and, significantly, to demonstrate the impact of a collective response to the consultation to other Sex Workers. We consider this vital to decreasing the greater stigma and isolation many of our community are currently and have been experiencing due to the harmful and inaccurate stereotypes presented by the consultation, while encouraging members of the community, and the general public, to develop their own understanding of the issues raised in the consultation.



EXAMPLE 1

This is the response that was submitted by the Human Rights Watch.

[READ IT HERE](#)





Public Awareness Events

On 23 and 24 October, Umbrella Lane brought the voice of our community to the streets of Glasgow and Edinburgh at two socially distanced Public Awareness Events. Umbrella Lane staff and members of our community highlighted the devastating impacts that criminalising Sex Work would have on Workers. With the aim of gathering further evidence, we asked members of the public for their views on the Equally Safe consultation. Some thoughtful comments we noted included;



"I didn't know anything, so yeah, it's opened my eyes. It's important we include everybody, everybody's got to be included."

"As a Sex Therapist, this is very important and worrying for me and those I work with."

"Umbrella Lane has been really helpful for me, just as a member of the public, in coming to terms with what the terms – criminalisation, legalisation, decriminalisation etc – what they really mean, and what weight they carry."

"From Umbrella Lane I've realised there is a massive misconception about sex work, and the meaning of criminality or legalisation. I think people are unaware that this consultation is going on. Which Umbrella Lane is making people aware of – it made me aware of. But the consultation is pushing an agenda I believe, by calling all sex work violence against women, but that's not the case."



For those that were not able to join us, Umbrella Lane organised the **#TakingBackOurVoice Campaign video** where footage from the Glasgow event, including the public's response to the Equally Safe consultation, can be seen and heard.



The #TakingBackOurVoice Campaign

In October 2020, Umbrella Lane launched our awareness campaign, #TakingBackOurVoice. The main goals of this campaign were to destigmatise Sex Work and to humanise Sex Workers and their choices in the public perception. Although organising this kind of high-profile campaign during a global pandemic came with its challenges, Umbrella Lane rose to that challenge, taking action to make sure that the diverse voices of our community were heard. We developed a powerful visual narrative through a photo series, working closely with Sex Workers and a celebrated photographer in order to generate the most impact from our campaign.

The first stage of this was to ask Sex Workers from our community what the consultation means to them, and how it would affect their lives. These were two of the responses we received from Workers:

"The government's attitude towards Sex Workers is really unhelpful. Treating us all as victims and promoting a "support to exit" approach amongst support services discourages us to want to access those services. I've been in the industry almost 6 years now. I am choosing to do this job, and I'm not looking for support to exit. I'm looking for the government to help make my work safer, to support a harm reduction approach. I'd love to be able to work with a friend for safety, but under current laws, this is illegal. The consultation to end demand only serves to further stigmatise workers and if the Nordic Model passes, it will make our work more dangerous. It would put workers in situations where they feel pressured into seeing dangerous clients or providing services, they're not comfortable with."

"Having to face a consultation after months of battling to simply survive, coping with the overwhelming feelings of isolation, uncertainty and potential poverty caused by the government during lockdown is one knock too many. This isn't a solution to violence against workers, this is a direct pathway to it. People who may face criminal prosecution for simply visiting a sex worker are far more likely to be dangerous people who have little regard for the law, who view sex workers as less than human and feel they have nothing to lose by using threatening or violent behaviour. You will not eradicate the demand for the work, but you will create a more dangerous landscape for us to work in."

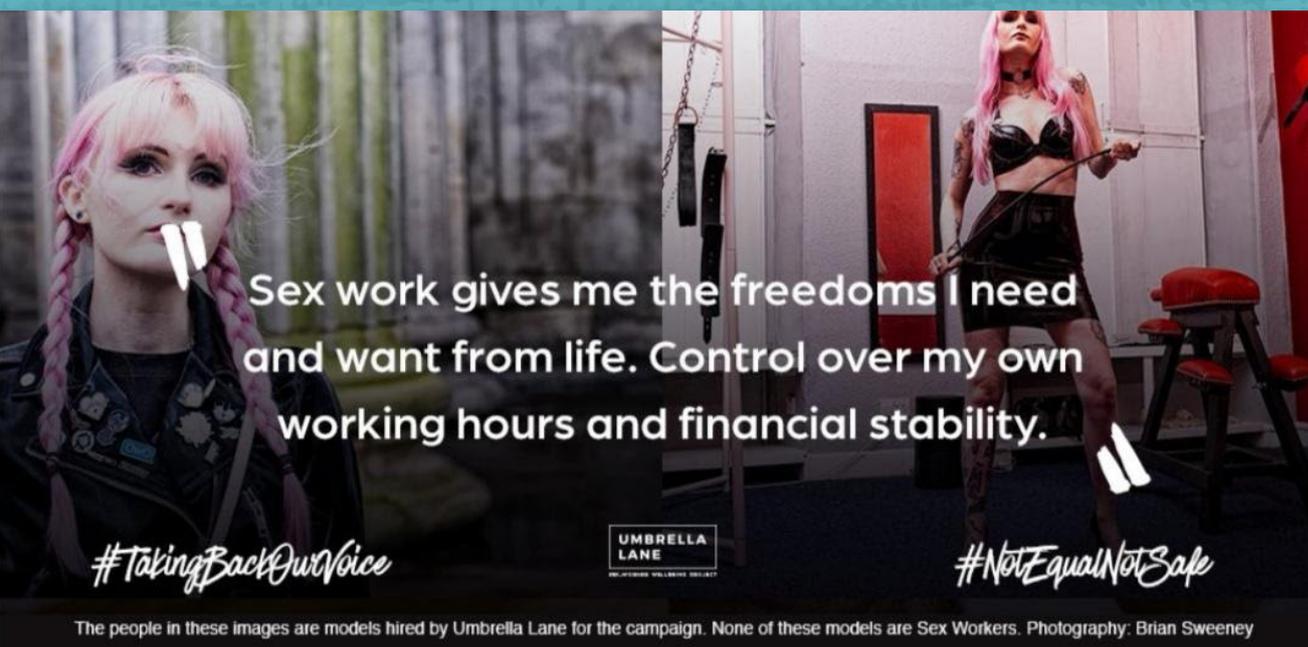
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The #TakingBackOurVoice Photo Campaign

Using these stories and experiences from Sex Workers themselves, we collaborated with the well-known Glasgow photographer Brian Sweeney. He brought to life a collection of powerful images highlighting the real-life experiences from our diverse Sex Worker community. Because of the ongoing dangers and stigma, the campaign images used models to portray "A Day in the Life" of a wide and diverse range of Sex Workers, alongside direct quotes from the Sex Worker whose life experiences each photo was portraying. The end result was highly successful in communicating a humanising and inclusive message as well as showing the diversity of the industry and reasons for involvement. The images were and continue to be widely shared across all social media platforms and have gained a great deal of attention and engagement from both Workers and the wider public.



The people in these images are models hired by Umbrella Lane for the campaign. None of these models are Sex Workers. Photography: Brian Sweeney



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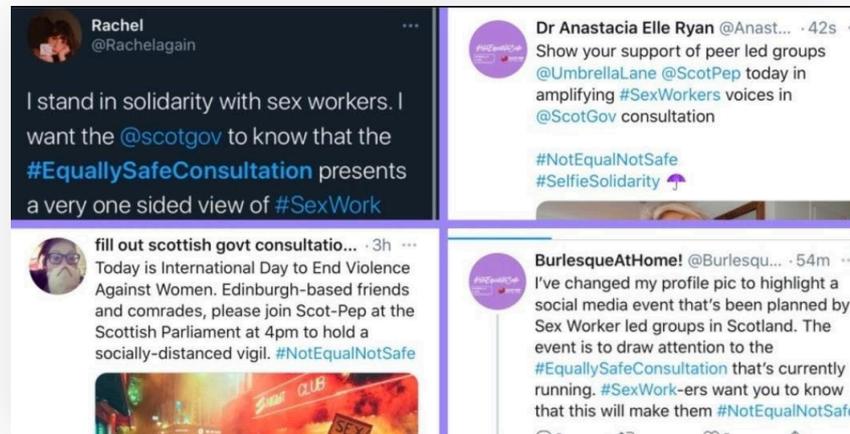


The #TakingBackOurVoice and #NotEqualNotSafe Online Takeover Event



To mark the launch of the campaign, Umbrella Lane allied with fellow Sex Worker-led organisation SCOT-PEP to organise a social media takeover event on 25th November 2020, to support a socially-distanced physical vigil outside Holyrood on the evening of that date. We were joined in solidarity with other members of the Sex Worker community, clients and allies to promote the wider **#NotEqualNotSafe** campaign.

Momentum continued to build throughout the Social Media Takeover Day as Umbrella Lane worked tirelessly to ensure a constant stream of content. This was produced with two primary objectives in mind. Firstly, we wanted to encourage an inclusive space where both Workers and allies felt comfortable in sharing their opinions and stories. Secondly, we wanted to raise awareness of the consultation and encourage a change of direction from the consultation's current stigmatising approach to one based on the best



We officially launched the powerful **#TakingBackOurVoice** campaign images on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, demonstrating to our followers the strength and voice of our community.

Many Sex Workers bravely took the time and energy to support the takeover day, despite the dangers of stigma, by changing their social media profile image to our purple digital logo and contributing to the event through their sharing of their stories, observations and comments. These provided a huge number of users with vital and unique insights into Sex Workers' individual lives.



Fill out the consultation using their guidance and support the safety, inclusion and needs of sex workers: scot-pep.org.uk/consultation/

#NotEqualNotSafe



To encourage responses to the consultation, Umbrella Lane staff conducted Live Q&A sessions throughout the day to provide information on the consultation. These were very popular and achieved record interaction on all social media platforms, totalling nearly 1000 viewers.

Our event was supported by and included a variety of diverse communities including male Workers, LGBTQIA+ Workers and allies, disabled activists, and political parties. To make the information we provided as accessible as possible, Umbrella Lane posted content in three languages, reflecting our goal of supporting all Workers, regardless of residency status or English proficiency, and instituted a variety of wider accessibility methods such as image descriptions for screen readers.



Neville Southall Twitter Takeover

In the evening of our Social Media Takeover Day, Umbrella Lane received the privilege of taking over former Wales and Everton footballer Neville Southall's (MBE) Twitter account, resulting in a positive space where Workers could express themselves in a safe but public forum where they could reach an audience who may not often see content of this kind. Neville is an outspoken advocate of Trans and Sex Worker's rights and his platform increased our reach to his more than 170,000 followers. We organised a series of educative posts relating to the consultation and addressed the stigma surrounding Sex Work. The outcome was a huge increase in followers across all platforms; increasing our future reach both as an organisation and a community, allowing us to continue growing both as an organisation and as a community.





Umbrella Lane Press & Media Coverage

As a result of our work around the Equally Safe consultation, Umbrella Lane made media headlines with Glasgow Live, North Edinburgh News and The National Scot.



We built strong relationships with journalists and were supported by Glasgow Evening Times, Edinburgh Evening News and Holyrood Magazine in highlighting the impact of the consultation on Sex Workers.



10th December

Caitlin Logan: Scotland needs a public health approach to prostitution

By Caitlin Logan | [@_Caitlogan](#)





Our powerful campaign images continue to succeed in drawing attention to the consultation on a global scale, having been published by **The Times** as well as being shared by individuals and social media pages based as far as the US, Canada and Australia.



Coinciding with our social media takeover event, **Human Rights Watch** published their response to the consultation, which states that this is a Human Rights issue, and that the dangers of criminalisation cannot be responsibly ignored.

The impact of the **#NotEqualNotSafe** social media takeover event was published in **The Scotsman** and attracted considerable attention to both Umbrella Lane and the Equally Safe consultation.



News > Crime

Sex workers hold vigil demanding government scrap moves to criminalise purchase of sex

Sex workers are protesting outside Holyrood today to demand moves to criminalise purchase of sex should be scrapped, warning it will cause harm to women.





In Scotland, sex workers are battling for their rights
#NotEqualNotSafe

*Posted Friday 4th December 2020 /
Text By Megan Wallace
Photography © courtesy of Umbrella Lane*

Huck Magazine and The Times promoted Umbrella Lane and SCOT-PEP's #NotEqualNotSafe campaign efforts to raise awareness of Sex Workers safety as the deadline of the Equally Safe consultation approaches.



The reach of Umbrella Lane's response to the Equally Safe consultation broadened to **BBC Radio station** twice where **Anastacia Ryan** and members from the **Umbrella Lane community** were joined by **Dr Andrew Tickell** from **Glasgow Caledonian University** on **BBC Sounds Mornings with Kaye Adams** to discuss the consultation and Umbrella Lane's efforts to eradicate stigma through our **#TakingBackOurVoice** campaign.



Mornings
with Kaye Adams

Our Impact, Summarised



During this campaign we succeeded in:

- Providing Sex Workers with a platform to speak out and involve themselves in the discussion around the Equally Safe consultation.
- Increasing awareness about the need for responses to the Scottish Government's consultation amongst both Sex Workers and the wider community.
- Promoting a space for individual reflection on issues raised by the consultation along with accurate and verified information, a sad contrast to the consultation itself.
- Encouraging geographic inclusivity of Workers across Scotland as well as on a wider global scale.
- Promoting a more accurate and inclusive perception of the of Sex Workers community by including male, LGBTQIA+, gender non-conforming, disabled and chronically ill Workers in both our campaign and outreach, as well as Sex Workers who are parenting children.
- Growing our network of Sex Workers and allies to support the health and wellbeing of the Sex Worker community.
- Combating the dehumanising and stigmatising effects of the consultation on Workers, clients, and allies.





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Presenting Our Thanks



Although we are a small charity organisation with limited resources, we are proud to have attracted considerable attention to Sex Workers' voices, not only in Scotland, but nationally across the UK and internationally as well. This is thanks to our passionate team of dedicated staff and the support of other Sex Worker-led organisations who stand in solidarity with and support us. We continue to advocate for Sex Workers' agency, health, wellbeing and security in Scotland. For more information on Umbrella Lane's reach during this consultation please visit

<https://www.umbrellalane.org/blog>



Special Thanks to our Allies



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Thank you for reading

Visit www.umbrellalane.org

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

Email:

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