

Building Choices for the Future

1. Title of Project

Building Choices for the Future

The following proposal was submitted to Federal Cooperatives Secretariat in June 2008. Although we have yet to hear officially, we have been informed that we will not be receiving support for these actions. The reason for the lack of support was “the project is too ambitious”.

We have decided to try to move forward on these ideas in spite of this set back and are now immersed in raising the money ourselves. We have governance in place and a great advisory board and so will be able to ensure accountability.

Progress will be highlighted under the individual enterprise section of the web site. As all of these enterprises are intimately linked to one another it was decided to move forward in one project. Please note that this project is **NOT the highly controversial Cooperative Brothel Project** and is focused on alternative sources of income and exiting opportunities for sex industry workers looking for a change.

If you would like to support these actions in going forward please see the “Support Us” section for details on ways the greater community can support choices for sex workers.

2. Project Description

Objectives

1. To provide a co-operative solution to the wide range of barriers facing Canadian sex workers by creating viable, attainable, sex worker owned and controlled choices within and outside the sex industry through the art, catering, consulting and publishing enterprises to be planned and operated by the West Coast Co-operative of Sex Industry Professionals.
2. To demonstrate how the co-operative enterprises could allow small localized groups of sex workers to come together as a community to define their choices as individuals and take control of their future by building sex worker community capacity through:
 - planning and operating the co-op
 - defining each of the enterprises in concrete business planning terms and implementing them in time for the 2010 Olympics
 - learning about business practices related to all the co-op enterprises
 - gaining concrete marketable skills that can translate into alternative income choices and solutions for those who wish to exit the sex trade

3. To document and share our knowledge, experiences, successes and failures with sex workers all over Canada; and.

4. To support sex workers all over Canada in coming together to explore these ideas and prioritize what they need as a community for themselves on a localized level.

Background

About the British Columbia Coalition of Experiential Communities

The British Columbia Coalition of Experiential Communities (BCCEC) is a consortium of sex worker activists who work to eliminate the oppressive systems and forces that create harm for individuals within the sex industry. We operate under the principle that members commit to creating an environment of inclusion and change.

We support diverse perspectives and experiences except where they contribute to harm of sex workers. The BCCEW does not support enforcement or rehabilitation models that either promote the continued criminalization of sex workers or sex worker dependency on social programs.

The Mission of BCCEC

The BCCEC is a mechanism for the voices of experiential individuals to:

- influence legislation and policies that pertain to sex workers to become inclusive of their goals and desires;
- advocate for a continuum of peer driven programs, initiatives and services.

The BCCEC may also serve as a:

- consultative body of expertise on sex work issues;
- host organization for sex worker workshops, events and initiatives; and
- research and data collection body.

BCCEC Philosophy and Guiding Principles

The BCCEC:

- Supports and promotes experiential leadership;
- Supports development of essential services and a continuum of services for active sex workers through class advocacy, media response and public awareness;
- Creates a supportive network for sex worker activists to have opportunities for leadership and action on issues that impact their lives and the well being of their communities; and
- Works to ensure the fundamental recognition of human rights for sex workers including dignity, safety, equality, and empowerment;

The following Guiding Principles reflect the collective and longstanding activism of BCCEC members who have worked and will continue to work to eradicate racism, poverty, sexism, and violence by every practical means possible. BCCEC principles are built on our experiential

analysis of sex work issues and are intended to advance dialogue and activism within the coalition and within our communities:

We value, embrace and mobilize the authentic experiential knowledge, leadership and skill sets of women in the sex trade as the vehicle towards change;

We work to ensure opportunities for self-advocacy among people in and from the sex trade;

We work to open dialogue for the reduction of harm and the elimination of the social, economic, and political conditions that lead to the survival sex trade, sexual slavery and trafficking in persons;

We provide access to our expertise and our published materials to stakeholders in the BC/Yukon region and beyond!

Why a Co-operative?

A few years ago Mohammad Yunus won the Nobel Peace Prize for designing a co-operative micro lending program which was adapted as a co-operative credit union for sex workers working in West Bengal in India. Sex workers in India do not have the option to exit the sex trade as they live within a cast system: once a sex worker always a sex worker. As a community they identified their biggest problem as living in debt servitude to the brothel owners. They would take small loans to buy diapers or food and end up paying exorbitant amounts of interest which forced them to borrow more. As a result, they were left living in a state of slavery. The co-operative credit union has had a tremendous impact on the quality of life for sex workers in India and now has over 45,000 sex workers accessing its benefits.

We wondered, “Could this be a solution for Canadian sex workers?” So we endeavored to find out. In 2005, the ***Developing Capacity for Change*** Project followed and, Vancouver sex workers expressed their desire to explore co-operative business models as a way to generate alternative sources of income, increase health and safety, build community capacity and begin to take control of our collective destiny.

During 2005 a group of sex workers had also come together in partnership with Simon Fraser University and began the ***History of Sex Work Project*** in the hopes of discovering the history of sex work, our history, in the City of Vancouver. How did sex workers contribute to its growth, character and its conception? In recent years, the sex workers civil rights movement has become an international effort and sex workers all over the world are demanding human rights and labor standards. As in all civil rights movements, we need to understand our history in order to understand our place in the community. The foundation for change is to have pride in ourselves and the accomplishments of the sex workers before us.

We wanted to understand the factors which came to bear on the quality of life for sex workers throughout the life of our city and how the situation had degraded into the disaster we see today in the downtown east side of Vancouver. We learned how from the 1920's up until the early 70's the sex industry had existed in what were called "Supper Clubs" where a gentleman could be entertained with a nice dinner, an escort to keep him company, and a Las Vegas style exotic dance performance. Dancers, escorts, cigarette girls, waitresses, cooks, bouncers and bartenders all worked together under the same roof. This was a community where everyone worked within their own personal boundaries and in relative safety, within a safe, supportive work environment.

The end results of the project were a book and a multi media museum installation which are owned by and created by the project participants. The Group discussed how the project could be expanded to include an historical walking tour and supper club style dinner and show that could provide employment opportunities for sex workers, empower sex workers through knowledge of our history, and support the creation of a number of co-operative enterprises.

The enterprises the team thought would support the expansion of the project were **catering** (preparing and serving dinner to patrons), **publishing** (to ensure ownership of our book and other creative property), **consulting** (project participants have already been invited to lecture on the project and its findings at universities) and, of course **art** (the *History* project is very artistic and as well, the team intends to develop a play).

During the project "*Leading the Way*" in 2006-07 Vancouver sex workers worked hard to create a framework for this co-operative and have finalized governance policies, decision making procedures, terms of reference, membership criteria, code of conduct, and conflict management procedures that will reflect what they envision as a community. We were officially incorporated in February, 2008 as the *West Coast Co-operative of Sex Industry Professionals*. The co-operative will enable the development of a number of sex worker community enterprises such as:

The Art Enterprise

Sex work and art have always been intimately related. Most sex workers actively pursue art in the form of poetry, sketching, photography, fashion, painting and of course writing. This aspect of the co-operative has captured the imagination of the sex worker community with plans for the development of a play. Sex workers will engage artists and other experts from the greater community to share techniques in a variety of artistic media to find a way to collectively market sex worker art and to ensure the availability of tools for creating art.

This creative and lighter side of community development has given sex workers hope and will provide positive forms of expression outside of the challenges they face in their daily lives. It is hoped the art projects will also serve to build understanding between the sex worker community and the greater community.

Publishing Enterprise

Publishing rights and the laws that govern intellectual property are complex. Vancouver sex workers express a general sense of distrust in the system at large when discussing matters of ownership of their writing and other artistic creations. Through engaging experts in the publishing field, sex workers plan to design a sex worker owned and controlled publishing enterprise that will address their concerns and ensure that sex worker publications remain the property of sex workers.

Catering Enterprise

Many organizations have formed catering companies as a way to generate funds, build community capacity and create alternative sources of income.

Sex workers exiting the industry explained that existing supports do not provide an opportunity for them to secure employment or to earn money. Food preparation is an accessible skill with which members are familiar. The integration of food preparation, serving, kitchen clean up and bartending positions into the co-op's various activities will involve learning about the food service industry and will give sex workers the skills and experience they need to work not only within the co-op but to compete for employment outside of the sex industry.

Consulting Enterprise

For years sex industry workers have lectured at universities, trained police officers, trained middle and upper management employees from various departments, educated secondary school students, residence in youth detention and acted as consultants to community organization and other private institution on matters related to sex work.

Sex workers desire to develop standardized curricula that incorporate lived experience, research and social theory. Sex Workers can collectively set rates and customize workshops for various audiences and environments. This element of the co-operative will provide opportunities for industry workers to share information about the industry, share community based research findings and sex industry worker led initiatives without being 'represented' by outsiders.

These identified enterprises will allow the sex working community to move forward towards community stabilization, choices and dignity.

Activities

The following work plan outlines the proposed project activities in three phases;

PHASE ONE-*Planning, Community Capacity Building and Engagement of Business Experts*

Co-op Development Coordinator-Roles and Responsibilities

- re-affirm community partnerships related to co-op development and establish new partnerships based on the capacity needs of the sex worker community to reach our goals
- design a series of focus group engagements for each of the respective enterprises inclusive of community capacity development activities, detailed business planning and engagement with experts in each of the fields of business to be explored.
- design contracts for the Individual Enterprise Development Co-coordinators inclusive of note taking/report writing for the facilitation of the development of each of the co-operative enterprises (art, consulting, publishing and catering).
- secure contracts with Coordinators for each of the co-operative enterprises (BCCEC/WCCSIP members)
- collect all notes and business plans, space requirements, equipment costs, etc from meetings and organize as a report to share and discuss with other co-operative stakeholders.
- disseminate plan to experts, community members and stakeholders
- finalize the plans including timelines for the four enterprises.

Individual Enterprise Development Coordinators

- to engage and formalize a cohort of sex workers to make up the development teams for each of the co-operative enterprises
- adopt and refine the terms of reference to reflect each individual enterprise
- facilitate focus groups and document all discussions
- present all notes and finalized business plans for each of the identified enterprises to co-op development coordinator
- present plans for each of the identified enterprises for scrutiny by WCCSIP members and to be accepted as official enterprises of the co-op

PHASE TWO-*Implementation of Business Plans*

Co-op Development Coordinator- Roles and Responsibilities

- secure physical space for the enterprises based on the space required defined in the business plans
- support the Individual Enterprise Development Coordinators in the purchase of necessary equipment and implementation of other activities in the business plans
- engage industry experts as required for advice and training
- work with Individual Enterprise Development Coordinators to plan the opening event and ensure all enterprises have the opportunity to be showcased
- prepare and share the report on our experiences with as broad an audience as possible

Individual Enterprise Development Coordinators

- arrange training for employees of each of the enterprises in whatever skills may be required for implementing the business plan.
- purchase the necessary equipment for each of the enterprises
- follow through on the activities outlined in the business plan
- work towards each enterprise being ready for the opening event
- submit a finalized report to coordinator on the experiences of developing the enterprises

Measuring Success

Co-op Development Coordinator- Ongoing through out project

- identify qualitative and quantitative indicators of the success of the enterprises, e.g. number of members employed, volume of sales in relation to projections, increase in members' self-esteem, members' attitude towards the future, etc.
- design procedures for capturing the information
- support Individual Enterprise Development Coordinators in taking these measurements
- prepare results in the form of a report to provide continued information to all stakeholders in regard to the development and success of the co-operative

4. Results

Innovation

The West Coast Co-operative of Sex Industry Professionals is Canada's first sex worker co-operative; it is a brand-new solution for sex worker choices and safety. We hope to demonstrate how this innovative approach could address issues facing sex workers related to their health, safety, alternative sources of income and quality of life in communities all over Canada.

Priorities

This project clearly addresses the following priorities as described below;

- **Access to health care and home care-** The co-op has plans to host a health night in partnership with the Street Nurses in an effort to bring health care to street entrenched workers who have difficulties dealing with mainstream health care approaches. Harm reduction principles state you must meet people where they are. Sex workers have expressed time and time again how sex worker controlled environments are safe spaces. By bringing the nurses to us, we will be honoring the most fundamental of harm reduction approaches and providing access to non-judgmental health care.

- **Economic development in rural, remote or northern communities-** The Co-op has strong ties with rural communities in Kamloops and Prince George through a partnership with the BC Coalition of Experiential Women and Communities. There are plans underway to expand those ties to Prince Rupert, Coquitlam, Abbotsford and Surrey. During the initial development of these ideas through the first two projects, rural sex working communities were engaged and expressed a desire to further explore how co-operative business models could support improving their health, safety and quality of life.
- **Development of aboriginal communities-** This project reflects the diversity of sex working communities as it includes women, men and trans-individuals as well as those from different ‘classes’ and varying capacities and abilities. More specifically, sex workers engaged are multi-literate and culturally diverse. First Nations, Asian, Caucasian, Black workers and those of mixed race are currently invested. First Nations Communities are particularly reluctant to discuss issues related to members of their community being engaged in the sex trade. The high numbers of First Nations women on the missing women’s list are particularly disturbing and it is hoped that the co-operative enterprises will support choices and space for this isolated group to come together, learn about their culture and share their experiences as First Nations sex workers.
- **Community solutions to environmental challenges-** Sex Workers expressed how living in the downtown east side was akin to living in a war zone [See definition below] . The challenges of living in this dangerous environment could be impacted through community development, ownership and direction. The time has come for the sex worker community to design its own solutions to the environmental challenges of living in what could easily be described as a war zone.

War Zone

1: a zone in which belligerents are waging war; *broadly: an area marked by extreme violence*

2: a designated area within which *rights of neutrals are not respected* by a belligerent nation in time of war.

Expected Outcomes

Professional business planning and development of the West Coast Co-operative of Sex Industry Professionals enterprises will have the following results:

- The co-operative economic model of ownership will ensure that sex workers have control over their collective destiny, the direction of their enterprises and the profits from these enterprises.
- Sex workers will have control of their creative and intellectual property.
- Professional marketing strategies will ensure the success of sex worker enterprises and that they continue to have the opportunity to access alternative employment and income sources.
- The co-op and its physical location will create a centre for information and skill development for all sex workers, will become the foundation for sex workers to

come together as a community and will set an excellent example within the sex worker community and for the mainstream community of collaboration and success.

- Sex workers in rural communities will learn about the terms of reference for the West Coast Co-operative of Sex Industry Professionals, will be invited to accept the terms and become co-operative members, and will be supported in creating enterprises and taking part in the enterprises currently underway.

As a result of their participation in the project, co-op members will:

- Build on their collective experience to develop enterprises that provide meaningful employment for them,
- Develop new skills as a community
- Develop business skills such as marketing, financial planning, human resource management, service delivery and managerial and computer skills,
- Develop the skills to manage the co-op through an active board of directors
- Develop credibility in the mainstream community and become part of a network of businesses, co-operatives, and community organizations involved the respectful promotion of sex worker created and controlled enterprises.
- Be empowered to speak about their experiences and teach others how to reduce the harms of the past.
- Acquire tangible marketable skills and the confidence to find employment outside of the sex industry in a meaningful and sustainable way.
- Be empowered to have an active role in defining solutions to issues facing sex workers in Canada today

Sharing the Results

The West Coast Co-operative of Sex Industry Professionals will share the results of Building Choices for the Future in a pro-active way as well as responding to all who request information about the project. Specifically we will ensure the following have an opportunity to review our successes, failures and experiences throughout the project;

- Sex worker community locally, nationally and internationally,
- Co-op sector organizations: the Canadian Worker Co-op Federation, the Canadian Co-operative Association, le Conseil Canadien de la Co-operation, le Chantier de l'économie sociale, the BC Co-operative Association, the Co-operative Studies Institute at the University of Victoria and others,
- CED organizations with complementary interest in innovative uses of the co-op model as a strategy for marginalized communities,
- Members and committees of the Canadian CED Network involved in co-operatives and community economic development,
- Governments: federal, provincial, municipal government representatives,
- The broader public

Performance Measurements

- Co-op members will be active participants in establishing success indicators for the achievement of anticipated results; their expectations for the co-op, for themselves and for the sex working community will be recorded.
- Performance measures to be used include:
 - number of members in the co-op
 - total sales/success for each enterprise/ per year
 - total co-op revenue/year
 - income for individual members/year
 - numbers of members participating in training programs
 - sessions offered by the co-op for partners, potential partners and general public
 - follow-up on initial stories to record members' experiences in the co-op to record the achievement of their goals
 - numbers of sex workers whose quality of life and freedom of choice have been impacted by their participation in the project.

4. Project Management

The BC Coalition of Experiential Communities has developed extensive management capacity over the past four years as a result of undertaking and managing a wide range of large and complex research, writing and organizational development projects successfully. Projects ranged in funding from \$ 5000 to \$75,000.00 These include:

- BCCEW - Developing Capacity for Change: Co-operative Development Exploration Report - Feb. 2007
- The BCCEW Newsletter entitled Got Game (2nd edition);
- The BCCEW Working Conditions research entitled In the Here and Now;
- The BCCEW Media Review document;
- The BCCEW Research document entitled From the Curb, Sex Worker's Perspectives on Violence and Domestic Trafficking;
- The BCCEW report on Policy Issues for Sex Workers in Prince George BC
- Research Ethics: A Guide for Community Organizations
- Tips for Individuals Participating in Community Based Research
- Bad Date Reporting and Response: Experiences and Insights from Sex Workers and Community Stakeholders

- Labor on the Margins- Exploring union development, industry association models and how labor standards and occupational health and safety training could impact the health and safety of sex industry workers.
- Leading the Way- strategic planning for sex worker co-operative development and sex industry stabilization
- The History of sex work Project- museum exhibit, multi media installation and book

Overall Management

The Co-op Development Coordinator, Susan Davis will be the overall manager of Building Choices for the Future. Susan has co-managed or been the sole manager of some of the BCCEC projects; as well, she oversaw the incorporation of the co-op and the establishment of its governance structure. The Individual Enterprise Development Coordinators will manage the planning and implementation of the four enterprises proposed under the supervision of the Co-op Development Coordinator.

Co-op Board

The directors of the West Coast Co-operative of Sex Industry Professionals include five members who are experienced participants in the management of the BCCEC projects. The Co-op has developed an effective governance system with policies in place for accountability, financial oversight and decision making procedures that ensure decisions reflect the vision and will of the sex industry community. Operational policies include the requirement that all check or monies distributed will need to be signed by and approved by two people, including one Director of the Co-op.

Advisory Board

An Advisory Board has been established which includes experienced professionals and stakeholders who will work closely with the Co-op to provide support, mentorship and resources to the overall project. For information on member of the advisory board or how become a member of the advisory board please contact the cooperative development coordinator.

5. Partnership Information

The partnerships that have evolved between the BCCEC and the greater community have allowed us to assemble the Advisory Board for Building Choices for the Future. . Community partnerships, always at the forefront of BCCEC activities have allowed us to achieve success in projects we have undertaken in the past.

The following organizations/ people/ projects support our initiatives::

BCCA
Vancity Credit Union
SFU

WISH Drop in center society
 Vancouver Coastal Health
 FIRST
 Watari
 Cedar Project
 VANDU
 Dr John Lowman
 Youth Co.

EXPENSES

<i>Phase One- Planning, Community Capacity Building September 01 /December31, 2008</i>	
Co-op Development Coordinator On contract for 4 months @\$1125.00 a month	\$4500.00
Four Individual Enterprise Development Coordinators On –contract for 4 months 4 individual enterprises/\$300/meeting Catering/ 15 meetings/\$4500 Publishing/4 meetings/\$1200 Consulting/5 meetings/\$1500 Arts/15 meetings/ \$4500	\$11,700.00
Honoraria for the meaningful involvement of sex workers in the development of the individual enterprises 6 sex workers 3 hrs per meeting/ \$20/hr 39 meetings total [See note below]	\$15,000.00
Meeting refreshments 39 meetings/\$50/per meeting	\$1950.00
Travel 39 meetings/ \$18.00 book of bus tickets	\$702.00
Professional fees: Co-op development- 5 days at \$500/day = \$2500 Restaurants and theatre design-4 days/@\$500 = \$2000 Construction-4 days@\$500 = \$2000 Business 4 days@\$500= \$2000 Accounting \$1500	\$10,000.00
Facilities/meeting space 39 meetings/\$200 per meeting	\$7800.00
Total Phase One	\$51,652.00

<i>Phase Two-Implementation January 1-March 31, 2009</i>	
Co-op Development Coordinator On contract 3 months/\$1125.00/month/ 3 months	\$3375.00
Individual Enterprise Development Coordinators On contract \$835/ week/per coordinator/3 months	\$10,020.00
Professional fees: Co-op development- 5 days at 500/day = 2500 Restaurants and theatre design-4 days/@\$500 = \$2000 Construction-4 days@\$500 =\$2000 Business 4 days@\$500= \$2000 Accounting 1500	\$10,000.00
Equipment purchase and construction costs: Rental of Physical space for cooperative enterprises \$50,000.00 Kitchen/cafe renovation/construction/ equipment purchase/ interior design implementation-\$60,000.00 Sound / audio visual/lighting equipment-\$7500.00 cameras, and other arts supplies\$3500.00	\$121,000.00
Facilities, meeting space 6 meetings @\$200	\$1200.00
Total Phase Two	\$142,595.00

TOTAL PROJECT EXPENSES

\$194,247.00

Note about the Honoraria: The honoraria proposed in the budget reflect the co-op's respect for the participation of its members and the meaningful involvement of sex workers in the design of these enterprises. Although the total amount of the honorarium is relatively large, it recognizes the value of each person's contribution in the project and respects the fact that many members are living in extreme poverty and need to earn money. The honoraria is based on a \$20.00/hr wage and meetings are 3 hrs long so \$60.00 per person per meeting/ planning/ capacity building session.

REVENUE

Item	Funding Goals	Other IN KIND
Phase One- Planning, Community Capacity Building	\$33,852.00	SFU- \$7800 (facilities) Advisory Group-\$10,000.00 (\$500/meeting for 4 meetings a year including 5/7 people)
Phase Two- Implementation	\$113,595.00	SFU-\$1200 (facilities) Advisory Group-\$10,000.00 (\$500/meeting/for 4 meetings a year including 5/7 people)
Total	\$165,247.00	\$29,000.00

7. Other Information Relevant to the Project

Many different approaches have been taken in addressing the issues facing the sex working community with varied results in the past. These ideas came from the community themselves in true harm reduction fashion. The trial in the case of the missing women has highlighted the terrible conditions facing sex workers, the fact that conditions are getting worse and that sex workers continue to go missing across Canada. Residents and business owners in neighborhoods impacted by sex work, police, service agencies and sex workers agree that something must be done to ensure all community members are supported and protected.

Sex workers expressed that being immersed in a foreign culture (not the street) when trying to adapt to mainstream employment made them feel isolated and outside of the community around them. Working in a sex worker controlled environment within a culture they understand could provide a bridge to entering mainstream society. The experience of working and the many aspects of running the co-operative will give sex workers the skills and experience they need to work not only within the co-op but to have the confidence they will need to compete for employment outside of the sex industry.

Co-operative business models may be the sustainable solution communities need to finally address the issues that force people into the survival sex trade and have a great impact on the health and safety of ALL community members.

Also, the sex worker community have expressed concerns over the upcoming Olympic Games and the impact that will have on their ability to make money.

Sex workers believe that Olympic visitors are not really a sex consumer group and expect that the economic stability we have experienced during the lead up the games has largely been

because of the international construction work force employed to meet the construction deadlines. Once construction is complete we believe we will experience an economic crash.

This combined with anticipated increases in enforcement during the games has the sex worker community worried about how we will make ends meet.

The planned enterprises could ensure that Vancouver sex workers have alternatives sources of income and economic stability during the games.

Thank you for taking the time to revue the West Coast Cooperative of Sex Industry Professionals plans for the future.