

THE SEX TRADE
AN **Evening Post** SPECIAL INVESTIGATION

Prostitution: where to get help

- **POW - Prostitution Outreach Workers**
Offers independent and non-judgemental advice for sex workers and their families, friends and partners who are affected by their situation. POW offers safe sex advice and condoms, has an in-house drugs worker, sexual health clinic and benefits advisor.
16 Independent Street, Radford
0115 924 9992
07966537839
www.pow-advice.co.uk
sonia@pow-advice.co.uk, andrea@pow-advice.co.uk
- **Jericho Road project**
A church-led project that involves 50 volunteers and three workers who do outreach work, provide support to people who use drugs and make prison visits to help sex workers when they are released.
75 Raleigh Street, Radford
0115 978 8787
admin@jerichoroad.org.uk
- **Compass - Young People's Drug and Alcohol Service**
Support for young people in Nottingham City and Broxtowe Borough with drug and alcohol problems.
0800 0217784
0115 924 8232
yp.notts@compass-uk.org
www.compass-uk.org
- **Head 2 Head**
Works with young people with emotional, mental health and substance misuse problems.
Nottingham: 0115 844 0515
- **Mansfield: 01623 784831/784827**
● **Regents House**
Offers confidential support for anyone affected by someone else's drug or alcohol abuse, and special support for families of young people involved in drugs.
Helpline from 9am to 7pm, 365 days a year: 0800 052 5959
0115 912 8050
regentshouse@carersfederation.co.uk
www.carersfederation.co.uk
- **Women's Aid Integrated Services (WAIS)**
Confidential service run by women for women and children experiencing or escaping domestic abuse
30 Chaucer Street
24 hour freephone 0808 800 0340
Mon - Fri (9am - 5pm) 0115 9475257
- **Prostitution task force**
Police, CPOs and PCSOs who carry out high-visibility patrols of the red light district to ensure prostitutes are safe and reassure residents
0300 300 9999 x 8015047
CPOs Richard Lee 07983427872 or Manny Romero 07985 246112
- **aspire**
Free confidential advice for people who need advice about drugs and alcohol and where to get help
104-114 Talbot Street
www.58i.org
07896932586
- **Anti-social behaviour helpline for Nottingham city residents 0115 9152020**
asbhelp@nottinghamcity.gov.uk

No two people get involved in prostitution for the same reason. In the latest article of a series, **CLAIRE CARTER** speaks to a charity about the support they give to prostitutes.

HOUSING is a key problem for sex workers in the city. It is estimated that about 90% of on-street prostitutes are homeless or have housing problems - which include staying in crack houses or on the floor at friends' and clients' houses, or sleeping rough.

Radford-based Prostitution Outreach Workers (POW) wants to see housing provision for sex workers improved as, often, women who have been attacked, emotionally coerced, groomed or exploited are faced with a barrage of probing housing questions when all they need is a safe haven.

"The major problem for street prostitutes is homelessness and drugs," said Sonia Dowdie, operations manager at POW.

"It really is hard to get someone into appropriate housing. Even if a woman has been attacked getting her into one

Housing is key issue for charity

of the refuges is very difficult - there are times when you ring up the helpline and they ask why these women first got into prostitution. For many of them who are desperate, this is not the right time to ask such a question."

Sonia would also like to see the approach to these women improved.

POW is a pioneering project because it is peer led. Support workers are volunteers and all have had direct experience of prostitution, drugs or prison and make no judgements on the around 200 sex workers who access their services every year voluntarily.

Specialists from outside are only used in administration and financial roles. As Sonia stressed, it's not all about

leaving prostitution, it's about supporting individuals at whatever stage they are at.

People can go to the Radford-based centre for support, advice and counselling as well as drug treatment, STI tests and contraception. Workers find clients sometimes want a listening ear from someone who understands that world. Some want to quit prostitution, others want to stay working in the sex industry. POW works to keep them safe and give them lifestyle choices.

"Some people get involved in prostitution and turn to drugs, some have a drug habit and turn to prostitution," added Sonia.

"There is no set reason. There are



CHAOTIC LIFESTYLE: On-street workers face more dangers. *POSED BY MODEL*

people that work only over Christmas to buy presents for their children.

"No two people have got the same story to tell. If you are going to empower someone to exit prostitution you need to deal with an array of issues."

"We come across young women that have been out there for a short while, and also women that have been working as prostitutes for 25 to 30 years and are quite content with their situation. Some people have made an informed choice, there are some that pay taxes."

POW has worked with men and women as young as 13 and up to 65. The key age group is 26 to 35-year-olds, with 90 accessing POW's services between October and December last year. The

next largest group is 36 to 40-year-olds, with 35 contacting POW for help.

They may work on the street, in brothels and saunas, or privately from home. POW recognises a hierarchy, with on-street workers often having more chaotic lifestyles influenced by drugs.

"Drugs and street prostitution go hand-in-hand. Off-street workers don't tend to have a drug problem, they may be recreational drug users. Off-street prostitution is less dangerous."

"The main difference is the chaotic lifestyle," added Sonia. "POW is very much based on relationships and listening to people to try and work out what the issues are

and how we can support them. The very nature of drugs is hard to understand. Even when people do want to get out it's really difficult."

For all the people they deal with, the workers at POW say "every single one sticks in the mind".

One worker, who did not want to be named, remembers spotting a girl one Sunday morning who had cuts and bruises to her face and had obviously been attacked. But she refused to go to hospital because she needed drugs.

Sadly her story is a common one. To try and keep on-street prostitutes safe, POW does outreach work twice a week on the streets in Nottingham, speaking to women and giving out con-

Tacking drug addictions of partners a priority

TACKLING the drug habits of the partners of prostitutes is one of the key priorities of the Crime and Drugs Partnership (CDP) to reduce on-street prostitution.

"We've come across women working to fund their own drug habit as well as someone else's," said Ellen Martin, senior strategy and communication manager at the CDP.

"It could be a brother, a sister, or, in one case, a father."

"If we don't address the partner's misuse issue we are perpetuating the problem."

Mrs Martin said they have seen the number of on-street prostitutes addicted to class A drugs soar in the last ten years - with 95% of on-street workers now known to use class A drugs. She said in many of the cases

on-street workers had become addicted to drugs through a partner and may be working to fund both of their habits, so it was important not to treat the prostitute's addiction in isolation.

She added: "There has been a change in the old style 'pimp', there are now substance issues and a bit of co-dependency."

"If you get the woman stabilised but the partner has not addressed their issues then the problem still remains."

Mrs Martin added that as drugs have increased in the on-street prostitution world, so has the threat of violence.

"Crack cocaine seems to be the drug of choice but if you talk to a lot of women it will be about what they can get hold of," she said.

working on the streets during University term times.

POW offers support to people affected by prostitution, including children and mothers of prostitutes as well as their partners. They opened up the service to allow men to make contact. The majority of people making contact with POW are women, with 173 females and 44 males making contact between October and December last year.

Of these, 52 were people who were affected by prostitution.

Sonia added: "People make assumptions that everyone who walks through the door is a prostitute. We often support mothers. We have a grandmother who came in the other week because two of her daughters have started a chaotic lifestyle."

Sue Johnson, one of the founder members of POW, said things can change for street prostitutes but it takes a lot of effort from them as well as the workers who support them.

She said: "Things can change for some women as POW has proven, but it can be very hard work. It is about quality work, not quantity."

"I've seen miracles happen where women have got out of terrible situations. There's a lot of hard work that goes on with peer mentoring but it can be extremely rewarding."

"Peer education is the way to go. It's not a quick fix. For some of the younger women you can do a lot of preventative work."

"Now class A drugs and street prostitution go hand in hand. I think it's more dangerous for women because of the lifestyle drugs bring."

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