



UNIVERSITY OF  
LEICESTER

DEPARTMENT OF  
CRIMINOLOGY

# Practice Guidance for Working with Online Sex Workers



BEYOND THE GAZE





# Acknowledgements

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As well as being informed by findings from the Beyond the Gaze (BtG) surveys of projects, sex worker survey and interviews, this guidance has been shaped by practices and experiences shared by a range of individuals and organisations. This has included discussion and consultation within the BtG and National Ugly Mugs (NUM) Practitioners Group. Thanks to all those who have taken part in that group which first met in September 2015, all have contributed by sharing practice and thoughts which have shaped this guidance. Big thanks to NUM who have been a partner in the research and supported the project in a range of ways.

Particular thanks to the following who have helped with workshops, writing or commented on drafts: Rosie Campbell (University of Leicester), Stewart Cunningham (University of Strathclyde), Del Campbell (NUM), Hayley Speed and Fergal McCulloch (The Men’s Room, Manchester), Gaynor Trueman (University of York & North East Sex Work Forum), Emily Turner (Basis Yorkshire) Caroline Downes (formerly with The Matrix Project, Norwich), Aaron Chady (56 Dean Street Chelsea & Westminster NHS Trust, formerly Yorkshire MESMAC), Daniela Scotece (POW, Nottingham), Staci Ryan (Umbrella Lane, Glasgow), Jenny Medcalf (Spires, London), Chris Higgins (56 Dean Street Chelsea & Westminster NHS Trust) and Billie Stoica (GOSHH, Gender Orientation and Sexual Health HIV, Limerick).

During the project the BtG Research and Netreach Officer worked with staff and volunteers at Basis Yorkshire, in Basis Sex Work Projects netreach team to develop and deliver netreach activities. A big thanks to Basis for welcoming BtG and for being such a supportive partner in the research!

A wider range of projects and organisations who work with OLSWs in the UK shared their practice with the BtG research team, thanks for hosting us and sharing your experience.

Several individuals outside of the UK and Ireland have been consulted, thanks to Katrin Schiffer (Correlation Network) and Pjer Vriens (Policy Consultant eHealth, Rotterdam Public Health), who shared learning and practice about the Social Intervention Tool (SIT) produced by Correlation Network. Also, Penninah Mwangi (Coordinator, Bar Hostess Empowerment and Support Program [BHESP] in Kenya) who shared learning from BHESP’s work using online technology.

Thanks to those online sex workers, who cannot be named for matters of privacy and confidentiality, but who contributed to this guidance, took part in BtG research interviews and the sex worker survey. Your experience and views are invaluable.

Design and layout: Ollie Deans (Outlier Design Studio) & Charlotte Carter

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This practice guidance is based on the collective practice & knowledge shared by all those individuals and organisations who took part in the research about their experiences of working in the online sector. In the spirit of not reinventing the wheel we refer to and flag up some existing information and guidance resources. Working within the confines of word limits this guidance is unable to do full justice to all the information and practice shared, but it does highlight some key learning points from BtG which practitioners may choose to consider in their work.

Regulations for charities, social enterprises, statutory sector bodies as well as wider policy and law related to sex work and online regulation, technology and the online terrain are constantly changing. Hence whilst the authors have tried to ensure the accuracy of the text, we accept no legal liability for any errors or omissions and would expect all developing practice to work within their own organisational policies and take steps to ensure their work is informed by current legislation and statutory guidance related to their work. We advise practitioners and organisations to use this document as it is intended, a resource which shares some learning from research and practice at a point in time.

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Beyond the Gaze (2018). *Practice Guidance for Working With Online Sex Workers*.  
Department of Criminology, University of Leicester.

## Abbreviations:

BtG	Beyond the Gaze
ICT	Information and communications technology
ICRSE	International Committee for the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe
LGBTQ	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning
OLSWs	Online sex workers
OLSW	Online sex work
NSWP	Global Network of Sex Work Projects
NUM	National Ugly Mugs
PAR	Participatory Action Research
TSWs	Transgender sex workers
UKNSWP	UK Network of Sex Work Projects
WHO	World Health Organisation

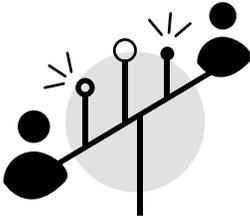
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*N.B. Gender neutral language has been used throughout this document where appropriate.*

# Practice Guidance for Working With Online Sex Workers

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# Contents



<b>1.</b>	<b>Introduction: setting the context</b> .....	1
	● 1.1 About Beyond the Gaze and National Ugly Mugs .....	1
	● 1.2 Aims of the guidance .....	1
	● 1.3 From Outreach to Netreach .....	2
	● 1.4 Online spaces of sex work in the UK: a dynamic terrain .....	3
	● 1.5 Key learning from Beyond the Gaze .....	5
<b>2.</b>	<b>Good practice principles, sex worker involvement and skills for Netreach</b> .....	8
	● 2.1 Good practice principles .....	8
	● 2.2 Sex worker inclusion and community empowerment .....	10
	● 2.3 Skills and knowledge for Netreach .....	15
<b>3.</b>	<b>Planning for Netreach and learning about the online sector</b> .....	18
	● 3.1 Strategy and protocols for Netreach .....	18
	● 3.2 Learning about the online sector .....	21
	● 3.3 Needs assessment .....	25
	● 3.4 Monitoring and evaluation .....	29
<b>4.</b>	<b>Netreach: using information communications technology to promote services and provide information/support</b> .....	30
	● 4.1 Data protection and Netreach .....	30
	● 4.2 Online and digital marketing strategy .....	31
	● 4.3 Targeted online methods for online sex workers .....	32
	● 4.4 Multiple methods .....	44
	● 4.5 Back to data protection and data storage .....	44
	● 4.6 Going online but not leaving behind face to face support and community development .....	45
<b>5.</b>	<b>Specific provisions: meeting diverse needs of the sector</b> .....	46
<b>6.</b>	<b>Resources and useful links</b> .....	57
<b>7.</b>	<b>References</b> .....	61

*N.B. This guidance may be subject to minor revisions.*

# 1. Introduction: setting the context

## 1.1 Beyond the Gaze

This guidance is one of the outcomes from the Beyond the Gaze (BtG) project. It has been produced with the support of National Ugly Mugs (NUM), who have been a partner in the research. BtG is a participatory action research project which has explored the safety, working practices and regulation of online sex work in the UK. It has examined how online and digital technology has shaped the sex industry. The project is the largest study to date of the UK online sex industry and has been funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and carried out by researchers from Leicester and Strathclyde Universities.

One aspect of the BtG study has been a consideration of the support needs of online sex workers (OLSWs) and learning how health, safety and support services working with sex workers have responded to the needs of this sector.

This guidance is primarily for; those employed or volunteering within organisations who provide information, advocacy, health or other support services to sex workers. From the start of the project in September 2015 BtG formed the Practitioners Forum. This was supported by NUM and has enabled; networking and sharing of practice regarding working with online sex workers, discussions on wider related practice and policy matters and an opportunity for organisations to be updated and consulted about the Beyond the Gaze (BtG) Research Project and NUM activity.

This guidance is informed by:

- Practice shared within the BtG Practitioners Group and other meetings with services who offer health or support services for sex workers.
- Findings from the BtG sex worker survey & in-depth interviews with online sex workers.
- Two surveys of projects working with sex workers carried out in 2016 and 2018.

**National Ugly Mugs (NUM)**,<sup>1</sup> as part of its wider training and advocacy work, promotes accessible, quality services for sex workers based on evidence and best practice. NUM and its predecessor UKNSWP have previously produced good practice guidance on a range of aspects of delivering information and support for sex workers. This guidance is timely because the largest sector of the UK sex industry is now online and organisations working with sex workers are increasingly working with people in this sector, or considering doing so.

## 1.2 Aims of the guidance

The guidance aims:

- To share key learning from BtG about the support needs of online sex workers (OLSWs).
- To offer guidance about providing information and support services for OLSWs, including netreach methods.
- To provide information about other existing relevant guidance and resources.



See BtG's book 'Internet Sex Work' based on the findings of the project here: [www.palgrave.com/gb/book/97833319656298](http://www.palgrave.com/gb/book/97833319656298)

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Additionally, summary findings from BtG can be found in a series of briefings. Download these here:

[www.beyond-the-gaze.com/briefings](http://www.beyond-the-gaze.com/briefings)

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One of the briefings produced presents summary findings and learning to inform practitioners involved in commissioning and delivering health and other support services who have contact with sex workers, including specialist sex work projects: [www.beyond-the-gaze.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/BtGbriefingpractionerscommissioners.pdf](http://www.beyond-the-gaze.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/BtGbriefingpractionerscommissioners.pdf)

<sup>1</sup> NUM is a third sector charity which promotes the rights of sex workers and aims to end violence against sex workers. It provides a national crime reporting scheme for sex workers. Sex workers, sex work projects and other organisations can join, make reports and receive warning alerts. For further information about NUM including how to join, go to: [www.uglymugs.org](http://www.uglymugs.org)

Over twenty years of research and practice evidence shows the importance and effectiveness of outreach undertaken by health and other organisations to better reach socially excluded, marginalised and stigmatised groups, including sex workers (INDOORS 2014a).

Outreach has been important for promoting services to sex workers and providing information and support (Home Office 2011). It has been identified as an effective approach for working with sex workers if practised sensitively and ethically (UKNSWP 2008a, INDOORS 2014b). It is intended to reduce barriers to service access, which include: service locations that sex workers may find difficult to access, prejudice, stigma, fear of judgemental attitudes and criminalisation. Traditionally outreach for sex workers has referred to attending physical locations such as bars, streets, lorry parks, working flats.

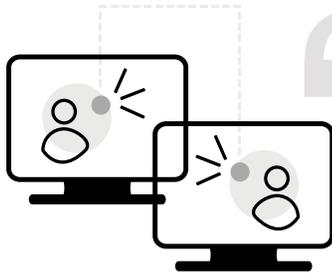
**Network of Sex Work Projects/ARHTAG** (1997) described outreach as when

*'services are taken to sex workers. This is often done by approaching sex workers in their workplace (street, saunas, clubs, bars, parks and beaches). Many projects also contact sex workers in their homes and informal meeting places'* (pg. 30).

INDOORS<sup>2</sup> (2014c) described outreach services as:

*'all activities that aim to reach out to and engage with a certain target group, often with the intention of offering information services and/or support. Within the scope of the INDOORS project, this refers mainly to outreach work done with and for indoor sex workers, mainly in the context of visits to indoors sex work venues'* (pg. 55).

**Netreach is simply a term to describe the internet or online version of outreach. BtG adopted a definition of netreach which captures a range of practices and approaches:**



Netreach is outreach and service provision using the internet, social media, other online platforms and digital technologies to communicate with sex workers, promote services and provide information or support.

Netreach has been developed as a response to the changing nature of the sex industry with the development and prominence of internet based sex work (IBSW), and the need to update outreach to include virtual spaces (INDOORS 2014b). Other terms are used to describe similar approaches, INDOORS (2014c) use the term 'online outreach' to describe outreach work done digitally:

*'...conducted in internet-based settings such as chat rooms, forums, instant messaging or other online interfaces which facilitate conversation. Online outreach is done in order to establish dialogue with a certain target group, and typically consists of promoting services and or support.'* (pg. 55)

The **Global Network of Sex Work Projects** (NSWP 2016) highlighted how internationally information and communications technology (ICT) has impacted on the sex industry;

*'sex worker organisations acknowledge that the internet has brought about changes in the sex industry and a large part of the industry is now invisible...Little is known about the characteristics and the needs of sex workers who mainly use ICT to conduct their work. Many organisations including those which provide HIV/AIDS information and services, are grappling with how to reach hard to reach groups'* (pg. 2)

ICT includes any communication devices or applications such as mobile phones, computer hardware and software and includes communications technology such as the internet.

BtG found that many organisations working with sex workers in the UK were facing challenges adapting to these changes. Many were more familiar with working with people in other sectors such as street or indoor establishment-based parlour sex work. Yet increasingly,

they were aware their services were less likely to be reaching those working in the online sector and that they, as services, were less aware of the needs of people working in that sector. There were exceptions for example, projects with a history of working with male sex workers in the UK had been using netreach approaches for some years. Others, however, were less experienced at reaching out to the online sector and using ICT tools to do so. INDOORS (2014b) also found this was so.

<sup>2</sup> INDOORS was an initiative coordinated by Autres Regards which had partner organisations from nine EU member states. It aimed to produce empowerment and skills building tools for national and migrant female sex workers working in hidden places. For further information and to access resources go to: [www.indoors-project.eu](http://www.indoors-project.eu)

In an e-health policy paper published by Correlation,<sup>3</sup> Kauppinen (2011) identified several reasons why using online services for marginalised groups, including sex workers, can be effective. These were that they:

- Can reach groups, who are not visible in regular outreach settings including sex workers who work via the internet.
- Address issues which are often avoided in face-to-face contacts and can be a good tool for addressing sensitive issues.
- Are cost effective.
- Can be provided across borders by services forming networks.
- The internet is an accessible platform and tool for service provision

In health provision for the wider population, including sexual health, digital health initiatives are increasingly used to enable people to book appointments, access health information and advice and access testing and treatment e.g. ordering self-test kits online for sexually transmitted infections. Health services have digital health strategies and digital engagement workers. Within the NHS, the **NHS digital program** aims to transform health and care through technology.

NSWP (2016) identified a range of ways information and communications technologies are being used to reach sex workers and have noted varying levels of success. INDOORS (2014b) noted how the shift to indoors and



[www.digital.nhs.uk/about-nhs-digital/our-work/transforming-health-and-care-through-technology](http://www.digital.nhs.uk/about-nhs-digital/our-work/transforming-health-and-care-through-technology)

online sex work now makes the internet an important medium for service provision and community-based activities for and with sex workers. They also noted that ICT has several advantages such as, reaching new groups of sex workers or refreshing existing programs, and yet whilst it can remove barriers for some, it can create barriers for others. They caution that online communication and services should be a compliment to and not a replacement of 'traditional services' and this is something with which BtG concurs, based on our own research and practice sharing.

## 1.4 Online spaces of sex work in the UK: a dynamic terrain

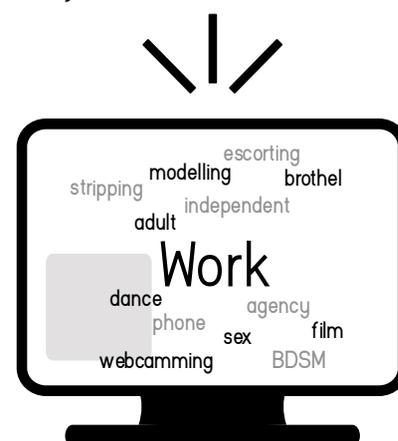
BtG has used the following definition for internet based or online sex work (OLSW):

*'Sex workers based on their own, or in collectives, or working through an agency, who use the internet to market or sell sexual services either directly (i.e. interacting with clients in person e.g. escorting, erotic massage, Bondage Domination Sado Masochism [BDSM]<sup>4</sup>) or indirectly (i.e. interacting with clients online e.g. webcamming)' (Sanders et. al 2017).*

Other terms are used to describe people working in this sector, for example Sex Work Research Wales (2014) used the term 'internet enabled sex work'.

BtG found OLSWs in the study often worked across different sectors using the internet, providing different forms of direct and indirect online sex work, moving between sectors according to need, with this flexibility facilitated by the internet. This reflected a wider fluidity and mobility of contemporary online sex work, not only across jobs within sex work but across other sectors of the labour market. In addition, sex workers work across all regions of the UK, working in a range of areas with 'touring' (travelling to be based in another area for a short period to work) a long-established practice. Sex workers also cross national boundaries, with a significant cohort of migrant sex workers in the UK sex industry and some UK nationals also touring to other countries. This technological and geographical mobility has implications for service provision.

Examples of OLSW jobs in the BtG study included;



<sup>3</sup> Between 2004 and 2018 **Correlation** was entitled the European Network on Social Inclusion and Health, working to increase the quality of life for marginalised groups particularly sex workers, undocumented migrants, drug users, men who have sex with men and young people at risk. In 2018 it changed its name to **Correlation: European Harm Reduction Network**.

<sup>4</sup> **Bondage, Domination, Sado Masochism** - some sex workers are specialist providers of BDSM services working as for example Dominatrices, submissives or other specialist roles. Note some BDSM services can be provided in person and also indirectly mediated by digital technology.



## Practice Point

An awareness and understanding of the diversity of sex work jobs and that workers may perform more than one is important for a range of reasons. It is important projects understand the communities they serve and this includes the specific working conditions and organisation of jobs and services in the online sector. This should inform decisions about which sectors of the sex industry they can deliver useful services to, how best to promote these services and best ways to deliver them. Health, safety and other service provisions for sex workers will be more effective with an understanding of the current structure of sex work in the UK and key trends in the sex industry.

## The size and prominence of the online sector

Internet sex markets have been pervasive since 2000 (although present prior to then). BtG has argued that from available data, online sex work now forms the largest sector of the sex industry in the UK. Taking just one leading advertising platform for UK internet based sex workers, 27,750 sex workers were verified as registered in a three month period **between** November 2017–end January 2018. This figure must, however, be approached with caution and we cannot reliably state that all of these registered users necessarily went on to actively sell sexual services in the UK.

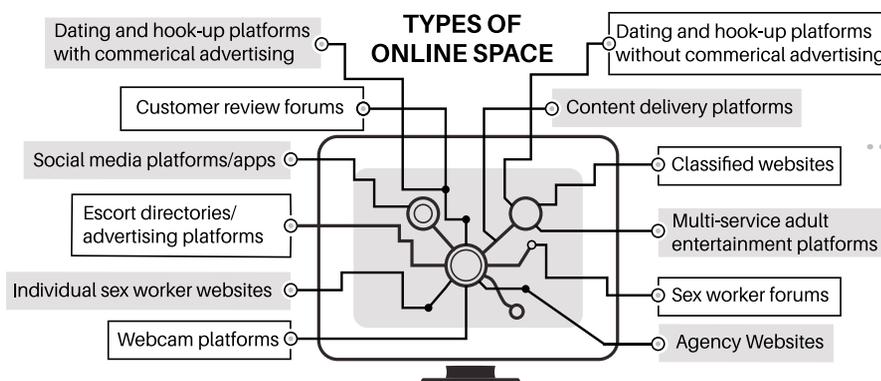
Given these difficulties BtG did not aim to assess the size of the online sector nor to carry out a comprehensive quantitative mapping of OLSW. BtG did explore the types of online platforms utilised by sex workers and their customers in the UK, and in doing so has highlighted that online sex work spaces are multiple and diverse, which is another reason why mapping the current UK sex industry, including the size of the sex worker population, is extremely challenging. BtG identified some of the key methodological and ethical challenges in mapping the scale and extent of IBSW, in addition to the enduring challenges of assessing all sex worker populations which are hidden, stigmatised and criminalised.

The challenges for those assessing the size of the OLSW sector are discussed in a BtG research briefing on 'Mapping the Online Sex Industry'. We will touch on mapping further in section 3 of this guidance.



## The BtG typology of online sex work space

The diversity of online working practices is reflected in the proliferation of online spaces providing or facilitating commercial sexual transactions. The BtG study identified a typology of twelve sex work related online environments, visualised below.



Descriptors of these spaces can be found in Cunningham et al. (2017):

[www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0160791X17302117?via%3Dihub](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0160791X17302117?via%3Dihub)

Table 1: Beyond the Gaze Typology of Online Spaces

BtG found sex workers engage in diverse ways in their use of online spaces, for marketing with different preferences and choices made about how and where to advertise. It is important that services working with the online sector are aware of, and understand, current spaces of online sex work, how they are used by sex workers and how sex workers use technology in their work.



## Practice Point

An awareness that the online environment is dynamic and constantly changing encourages services to stay informed, periodically reviewing their digital presence and wider service provision to the online sector. This puts services in a better position, to remain responsive and relevant.

The online environment is always changing as new platforms and technologies emerge, and as regulation of online spaces change and sex workers respond to changes. This was highlighted during the BtG Project when two changes to US law referred to as SESTA and FOSTA were passed in the US in April 2018 with significant impact not only in the USA.<sup>5</sup>

## 1.5 Key learning from Beyond the Gaze

### ● Tech use and skill amongst OLSWs

BtG found that the use of online & digital technology is mainstream for most sex workers in the UK in their daily work. That said, Beyond the Gaze highlighted a spectrum, reflecting differences in levels of usage, knowledge, access to digital/online resources, skills and preferences about online and digital tech amongst online sex workers. Whilst digital literacy and disparities in access to tech resources and knowledge is an issue for sex workers as well as the wider community, BtG found a significant proportion of OLSWs who were active in online spaces and who were 'tech savvy'.



### Practice Point

**Valuing sex workers knowledge & inclusion:** Many people working in the online sector will have greater knowledge about the online spaces and technology sex workers use than many staff and volunteers in services who do not have experience of online sex work. This knowledge and skills base are something to be valued and supported by those developing services or wanting to make provisions accessible to sex workers. This capacity provides opportunities for services to promote their services, support peer initiatives and involve OLSWs in outreach and wider community development. Harnessing the skills and knowledge amongst OLSWs and including sex workers in service planning and delivery brings several advantages.

The benefits of 'expert by experience' knowledge through sex worker inclusion/involvement, community development and empowerment models is identified throughout this guidance as good practice.



There is also the opportunity for projects to play a role in enabling access to technology and tech skills for those sex workers in all sectors who have limited access as part of digital inclusion.

### ● Professional networking, peer support and activism

The advantages of sex worker inclusion/involvement in service development is further highlighted by another key finding from BtG, which is the importance of peer support for sex workers in the online sector. Sex worker-led and peer support, initiatives, organisations and movements have been present in the UK for decades (Lopes 2006, AHRTAG/NSWP 1997). BtG highlighted how online technology has further enabled sex workers to organise, support each other, and to share information about marketing, safety, rights, and a wide range of work related matters. Virtual networking with other sex workers and online peer support were key themes in BtG, which found sex workers have used a range of online platforms, social media and other applications to create online communities as vehicles for professional networking and peer support. One of the reasons the internet is important to sex workers is that it gives access to peer support, 81% (n=517) of survey respondents strongly agreed or tended to agree that the internet gave them access to networks and peer support, only 4% (n=24) disagreed or strongly disagreed. When survey participants were asked about the main online platforms they used for advice or support those identified by the highest proportion of respondents were sex worker forums, with information, advice and support provided by other sex workers.

<sup>5</sup> 'Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act' (FOSTA) and 'Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act' (SESTA), passed the senate in the USA in March 2018. They are both amendments to the Communications Act 1934 and make online platforms liable for content generated by a third party, i.e. what their users say and do on their platforms. With this change platforms are responsible for third party content relating to sex trafficking or for conduct which intends to 'promote or facilitate the prostitution of another person'. These pieces of legislation at the time of writing were already having ramifications for US sex workers (and others on platforms within US jurisdiction) in terms of livelihood and safety as platforms assess their risk for liability and some make changes in relation to adult commercial sex content prior to the law being enacted.

Several sex worker led web-based forums have been established by sex workers in the UK over the last decade, which facilitate peer information sharing and support. Sex workers can register, read threads that related to issues they are interested in, post a request for advice or personal message specific members. Also, BtG found social media and free messaging apps such as WhatsApp have been embraced by a section of sex workers to create private peer support and networking groups, some have a large membership and geographical reach, others were smaller and localised or were formed by small groups of close colleagues or friends working in the sector.



The key reasons why sex workers used forums and private groups are discussed in the book based on BtG findings (Sanders et al. 2017).



**Practice Point**

Projects can signpost people new to sex work to sex worker web-based forums and private groups and can have a role in creating spaces and opportunities for sex worker peer support initiatives, community organising, online and in person. Sex worker inclusion in the design and delivery of services for sex worker is an important good practice principle, that will be reinforced within this guidance.

● Health, information and support services

BtG found a spectrum of use of health and other support services amongst OLSWs who took part in the research. Many sex workers who took part in interviews identified as resourceful being able to find information online and navigate services independently. As discussed previously, peer support was an important source of information, advice and support. Some people preferred to use mainstream sexual health services, others specialist sex work provisions, some had no specialist provision in their area of any kind for sex workers.

A key issue identified was that amongst OLSWs some existing services for sex workers were not seen as relevant to the needs of people in the sector. Key reasons identified in interviews as to why services weren't perceived relevant included: they were for sex workers involved in street sex work experiencing a range of particular social disadvantages; they did not have experience, knowledge or provisions to be able to provide relevant services for online/indoor sector; they were perceived as having an ethos which directly or indirectly 'judged' some in the online sector or they were at odds with the sex workers own ethos or approach to their sex working. For many male sex workers, services were perceived as women-centred. There was a section of sex workers interviewed who accessed specialist provisions for sex workers and feedback was positive overall, not only were the specific services accessed appreciated but also the non-judgemental and confidential approach they adopted.

Many sex workers in the study identified diverse preferences in relation to using health and support services, as well as, diverse needs amongst OLSWs. Many noted there was greater need for support amongst certain groups of 'vulnerable sex workers', most commonly identified were those experiencing problematic substance use, domestic abuse, forms of exploitation such as trafficking, poverty and financial hardship and certain groups of migrant sex workers who may face additional issues and barriers to accessing health and support. Specialist non-judgemental provisions were valued by the majority for their work with such 'vulnerable' groups but also for being there for all at any point they needed them, particularly during a health, safety or other crisis.

Section 5 overviews the type of services and support OLSWs identified as useful for people in their sector, and the services projects working with OLSWs identified as popular with OLSWs.



● Safety and privacy

NSWP (2016) and Sanders et al. (2017) have highlighted how sex workers are navigating the dual edged nature of online technology harnessing it positively for marketing, working without third parties, safety, access to information and support (particularly peer support). Yet at the same time, they are aware of the risks it can bring such as risks to privacy including identification, 'outing', harassment (online harassment was one of the main crimes experienced by sex workers in the BtG study). There are also risks related to economic precarity, the risk of online content being used without permission, changes to law and regulation which can lead to changes to/or the closure of online platforms, which can jeopardise business, livelihood and safety.



BtG has produced an information resource, 'Safety and Privacy for Online Sex Workers' with tips compiled by online sex workers based on the research. . . . .

Beyond the Gaze demonstrated how critical online technology is for sex worker safety with OLSWs using a wide range of online methods for screening & wider safety, blending online and offline safety strategies. It also highlighted methods and precautions sex workers used online to protect identity and privacy.



## ***Practice Point***

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Practitioners need to be aware of the context within which OLSWs use technology and online spaces and be sensitive to matters of privacy and precarity. Previous national and international guidance has flagged up the importance of confidentiality and how sex workers will be wary of individuals and organisations coming into their work spaces in street and establishment settings, with concerns about the impact on business, confidentiality and privacy, particularly in contexts of stigma and criminalisation. This is also the case in online spaces (NSWP 2016) and projects need to show the same sensitivity as should be practised in other contexts. Wariness and distrust of ‘authorities’ experienced by some online workers, which can include health and support services, is often heightened for migrant sex workers (Mai 2009). This can be for a range of reasons, for example, fears about irregular or undocumented immigration status. This is the same for migrants working in the online sector, who form a substantial cohort of OLSWs in the UK.

In section two we begin by looking at established good practice principles for the provision of services for sex workers identified in existing guidance, as these are also useful guiding principles for working with people in the online sector.

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## 2. Good practice principles, sex worker inclusion and skills for Netreach

There is a body of research and guidance exploring the provision of health and wider support for sex workers, which include several good practice principles (WHO 2013). Many of the core principles that occur repeatedly in these documents are relevant for the development and delivery of information and support services for people within the online sector. Many relate directly to some of the issues that should be considered in developing netreach services and working more widely with online sex workers. Indeed, some of these overlap with good practice flagged by projects who worked with online sex workers who took part in the BtG first project survey.

In this section we now summarise the key good practice principles, with a focus on sex worker inclusion and peer involvement. Many of these are embraced by the World Health Organisation (WHO 2013) which identifies good practice principles for working with sex workers in the context of health and HIV/AIDS programs for sex workers.

### 2.1 Good practice principles



See the World Health Organisation tool kit here: [www.who.int/hiv/topics/vct/sw\\_toolkit/en](http://www.who.int/hiv/topics/vct/sw_toolkit/en)

#### Needs assessment



Carrying out a needs assessment is recommended in the development of information, advice, health and support services for any community and has long been identified as good practice for working with sex workers (EUROPAP 1998, Network of Sex Work Projects & AHRTAG 1997, WHO 2013, Home Office 2011, TAMPEP 2009a). Needs assessments identify the support needs of sex workers, the local sex work context and wider socio-legal context which shapes needs and can impact on services. It is also a process which guards against 'professionals' in health and other service provisions making assumptions about what sex workers want or need.

Most guidance emphasises the need to recognise diversity of sex work settings and the varied needs of people in sex work (WHO 2013; TAMPEP 2009a; Home Office 2011); from this basis, services and support can be designed to then meet these needs. As part of this, recognising the particular needs of certain groups of sex workers and tailoring services so they are both relevant to their needs and accessible has been highlighted (UNAIDS 2012, EUROPAP 1998). For example, migrant sex workers, transgender sex workers and sex workers who are drug users will have some particular needs and face additional barriers to service access. Guidance has established that it is important that sex workers are not treated as a monolithic group by services; this includes those working in the same sector (including online) or those people of the same nationality (TAMPEP 2009a).

#### Recognising diverse and specific needs

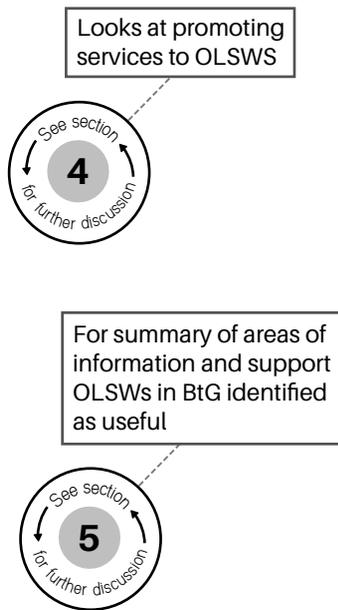
#### Holistic support and person-centred approach

Guidance from established bodies such as TAMPEP (2009a) and WHO (2013) recommends a holistic approach, putting in place a range of support provisions to address the diversity of sex workers health, welfare, safety and advocacy needs (Home Office 2011).

- 'In order to develop effective programmes within sex work settings, a holistic and person-centred approach to health, rights and well-being must be adopted which respond to the diverse and complex needs of sex workers' (TAMPEP, 2009a pg.13)

A person-centred approach based on individual needs is often recommended to ensure actual needs are met. This is determined by the individual not the service and the diversity of needs amongst sex workers.

## Targeted specialist services for sex workers



The advantages of targeted specialist services and provisions for sex workers has been well established since the 1980s when outreach and services emerged in the context of HIV prevention and wider harm reduction services (Pitcher 2006). Research and practice evidence continue to show that sex workers are a socially excluded group with a range of health and other needs, who face structural barriers (INDOORS 2014a; ICRSE 2017) in accessing health and other services, and who, therefore, require bespoke, targeted provisions (WHO 2013, Jeal and Salisbury 2007). Continued stigma and criminalisation mean that individuals do not disclose their sex work and fear judgement or discrimination from professionals. There is a strong evidence base in the UK and globally for the effectiveness of dedicated services at reaching sex workers, providing community-based services, meeting needs and providing a bridge into generic agencies, through partnership and advocacy, for those who want to access. In recent years concern has been expressed about the erosion of specialist sex worker provisions, with cuts to services and restructuring (Greenfell et al. 2016). Unfortunately, several specialist projects who were members of the BtG Practitioners group at the start of the project no longer existed at the end.

In the context of online sex work, generic health and other services who have sex workers amongst the people they provide services to, can consider how best to reach out to and provide services, working in partnership with specialist services where they exist. This includes ensuring their marketing and promotional messages acknowledge the sector and flagging that services are sex worker friendly.

Overwhelmingly practice guidance stresses that services and their staff/volunteers need to adopt and enact a non-judgemental approach in their practice (WHO 2013; NSW 1996, TAMPEP 2009a). Amongst the research and practice literature which has identified barriers to access to health and other support for sex workers, experiencing, or fearing, judgemental attitudes, discrimination from health professionals and others involved in service provision towards sex work and sex workers is a key factor. UNAIDS (2012) stresses the need for a non-judgemental approach, providing respectful, high quality services without distinction or discrimination.

## Non-judgemental approach

*'Ensure that support is non-judgemental'* - A project worker taking part in the first BtG project survey who stressed this was equally as important for quality support for people in the online sector.

## Confidentiality, trust and respecting the privacy of sex workers

NSWP has stressed that in the context of services which use ICT and work with people in internet mediated sex work *'maintenance of confidentiality and respect for privacy are of paramount importance'* (2016 pg. 20).

Sex workers continue to experience the impact of stigmatisation, marginalisation and criminalisation (INDOORS 2014a). Stigma and fear of authorities create barriers to accessing services. Indeed, some people have experienced discrimination from services; in this context, trust takes time to build and providing confidentiality has been recognised as very important for over two decades. WHO (2013) stress the need for services to ensure that sex workers' rights to privacy, confidentiality and anonymity are respected. Confidentiality is a vital aspect of good practice for information, advice, health and support services for sex workers.

Having an approach which removes as many barriers as possible for sex workers to access health and support services has been identified as effective. This includes taking services to sex work communities in a sensitive and appropriate manner;

*'Sex work projects that provide anonymous and low threshold services record limited amounts of personal information, and do not attempt to track sex workers beyond their engagement with the service. These services have proved most successful in establishing contact and engaging with sex workers'* (TAMPEP 2009a pg. 17).

Flexibility has been identified as important as part of this, with service models that are dynamic and respond to local needs and context (UNAIDS 2012; NSW 1997), flexibility in terms of locations, times and models of delivery.

## Community based, low threshold accessible services

## Coordinated and integrated services

Well-co-ordinated, collaborative, multi-agency approaches have been identified as important (UNAIDS 2012; Home Office 2011) for expanding choices, access and ensuring a range of services to meet varying needs. As one of its good practice recommendations, WHO (2013) advises that services are 'complimentary', i.e. they coordinated and integrated to make them more accessible, effective and provide strong referral links.

Guidance has highlighted the need to acknowledge and address structural issues which shape sex workers experiences, health and access to services (UNAIDS 2012, WHO 2013, ICRSE 2017). Global organisations have specifically drawn attention to the impact of criminalisation and stigma on sex worker rights, health and welfare, including access to services. Structural factors such as poverty, gender, education, employment rights and migration can create vulnerabilities, impacting on health and social inclusion (Shannon et al. 2015). TAMPEP (2009a) highlighted that local projects can have a role in 'reducing vulnerabilities' and minimising harm. Community empowerment and advocacy models seek to address these.



## Recognising the social and legal context in which online sex work takes place

## Do no harm and do not reinforce stigma

The World Health Organisation, UNAIDS and others have stressed that health and other support interventions for sex workers do not lead to outcomes which harm sex workers and that they avoid interventions which might reinforce stigma.

Approaches to health and support service provision that respect sex workers' human rights and accord basic dignity to sex workers is a key principle (TAMPEP 2009a, UNAIDS 2012; ICRSE 2017, WHO 2013). **UNAIDS** referred to human rights as a cornerstone to effective responses to HIV and sex work. Hence interventions must respect rights such as to health (and health care), privacy, liberty, security, gender equality, free choice of employment, freedom from violence and prohibition of forced labour and trafficking.

*'Empowerment, dignity, respect and a non-judgemental attitude must be part of every activity for and with sex workers' (TAMPEP 2009a, pg. 118)*

## Human rights based approach

## Sex worker inclusion, community empowerment and leadership

Finally, but perhaps the most important is the principle of meaningful inclusion of sex workers in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of interventions and services. WHO (2013) advises involving sex workers in all stages of the development and implementation of interventions. Linked to this is the importance of building capacities and leadership among sex workers to facilitate effective participation, community ownership and community led approaches.

## 2.2 Sex worker inclusion and community empowerment

Drawing on the final good practice principle that we have established, on sex worker inclusion and community empowerment, we now outline existing global guidance and good practice from within BtG on this theme.

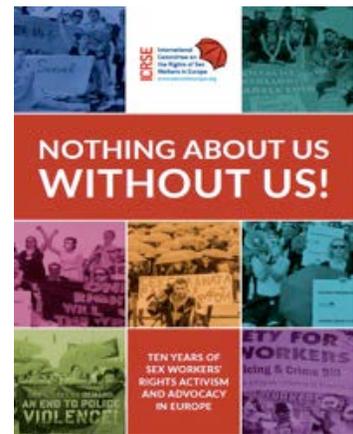
### Existing global guidance

Sex worker involvement has been advocated as good practice since the targeted HIV prevention outreach initiatives of the 1980s and 1990s were initially developed with sex workers. Involving sex workers, building community capacity and focusing on empowerment continues to be a foundational principle of much good practice guidance. This is not only a reminder of good practice in terms of effectiveness of services but flags ethical challenges if services or policies are developed without sex worker involvement.

The mantra 'Nothing About us Without Us' has been adopted amongst the global sex work rights activist community (ICRSE 2015) and encapsulates this approach.

TAMPEP (2009a) stressed that sex worker led services can be effective in overcoming some of the key barriers to accessing services i.e. stigma and fear of authorities which sex workers experience. They advocate for sex worker inclusion:

*'In line with accepted good practice, services should always seek to encourage and include sex workers at every stage in developing and evaluating services.'*  
(TAMPEP 2009a, pg.17)



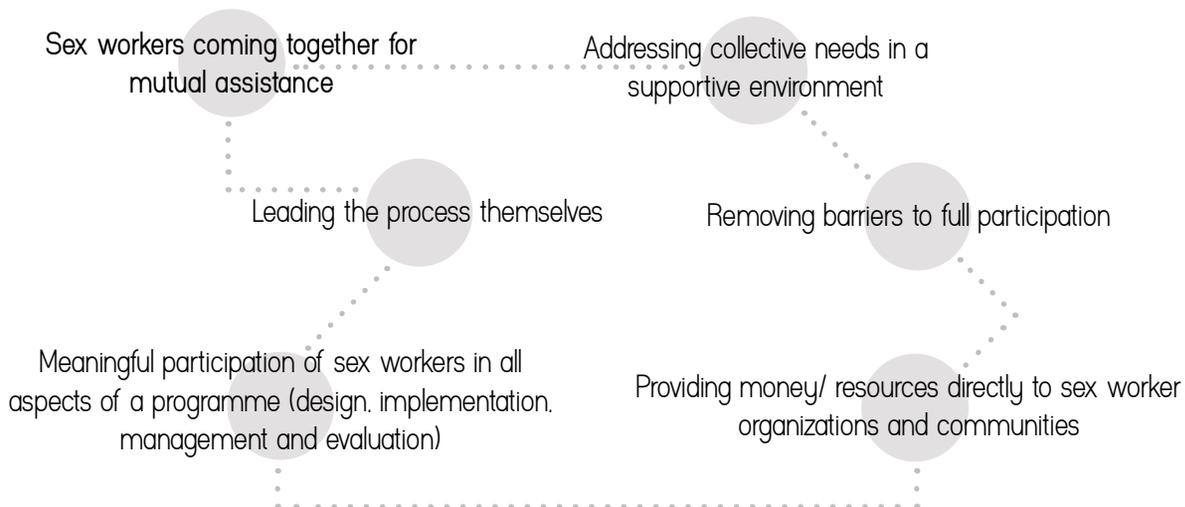
Front cover from: **International Committee for the Rights of Sex workers in Europe** (2015) *Nothing About Us Without Us!: Ten Years of Sex Workers Activism and Advocacy in Europe*, ICRSE, Amsterdam, Netherlands

They further acknowledge that establishing such services *'is neither an easy nor simple process to initiate'*, especially where sex work is criminalised, yet maintain that sex worker inclusion *'should be encouraged wherever possible and should be supported by established sex worker organisations'* (pg.17).

WHO also put great emphasis on sex worker inclusion and sex worker led models of health service delivery. In 2013, they produced a Sex Worker Implementation Tool (SWIT); this describes community empowerment in the context of HIV prevention programmes for sex workers. It identifies community empowerment for sex workers as something that should be part of health programmes for sex workers and

*'a process whereby sex workers take individual and collective ownership of programmes in order to achieve the most effective HIV responses, and take concrete action to address social and structural barriers to their broader health and human rights'* (WHO 2013 pg. 4)

Key features of community empowerment identified by WHO (2013) in the SWIT include amongst others;



WHO (2013) stressed that sex worker-led outreach programmes focus on the needs and experiences of sex workers themselves, not what programmers think sex workers need, and can stimulate community empowerment. This would also apply to netreach and wider work with workers in the online sector.

WHO (2013) encourages projects to foster sex worker meaningful inclusion and sex worker-led outreach and other initiatives. In developing services for OLSWs organisations could explore ways in which they could develop meaningful sex worker inclusion by adapting their practice and identifying new resources. The Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP 2018) published a brief document intended as a tool for organisations to self-assess whether they meaningfully involve sex workers, and for sex worker-led organisations to assess whether they are meaningfully involved. This is a useful resource for projects to use to reflect on their own practice.



**Practice Point**

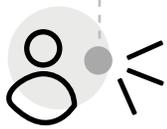
You could use the NSWP (2018) tool to help review the level of sex work inclusion in your services for OLSWs and as a basis for consultation and planning for further inclusion.

It utilises the definition of meaningful participation adopted by WHO (2013) which is achieved when sex workers choose how they are represented, how they are engaged in the process, whether to participate and have an equal voice in how partnerships are managed.



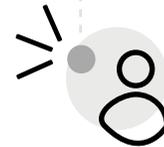
This followed on from an earlier briefing NSW (2017) on 'The meaningful involvement of sex workers in the development of health services', which can be found here: [www.nswp.org/sites/nswp.org/files/briefing\\_paper\\_meaningful\\_involvement\\_in\\_health\\_services\\_nswp\\_-\\_2017.pdf](http://www.nswp.org/sites/nswp.org/files/briefing_paper_meaningful_involvement_in_health_services_nswp_-_2017.pdf)

When projects who had experience of actively working with online sex workers were asked 'what advice they would give to others developing work with the sector?', Sex worker involvement and peer approaches was one of the key themes raised:



*'Sex workers telling other sex workers works best for us - peer information sharing on forums, online chatting with other workers. Work with sex workers - sex workers are so discreet that they will rarely trust an agency professional'* (**Project worker, sex worker led third sector project**)

*'Get sex workers on board with your work, include them in planning and delivery'* (**NHS sex work project worker**)



INDOORS (2014b) when examining the use of ICT in work with sex workers stressed the need to involve sex workers from the start in planning and implementing netreach and identified the advantages of:

- Bringing expert by experience advice about the most respectful and effective ways of approaching people in the sex work community.
- Knowledge about the platforms and technologies being used by sex workers.
- The services and resources most useful for workers in the sector.
- Skills and knowledge used in advisory work and knowledge about working practices and wider context: 'the target group have the most information on the structure of their living and work environments, service needs issues of interest and relevant topics'.
- The majority of projects who participated in the INDOORS study (2014b) developed some form of peer worker element to marketing of services through online channels and sex worker community development.

For over two decades peer education approaches have been identified as good practice for health and other rights based and support initiatives for migrant and national sex workers (EUROPAP 1998). TAMPEP identified the peer education method as 'one of the most effective educational strategies for mobile populations [that] will increase sex workers' own involvement and self-help initiatives. (2009a pg. 12)

*'Peer educators both migrant and national sex workers represent a valid resource for projects and services. They facilitate contact with sex workers and help to create and maintain a relationship that is based on a significant offer and acceptance of help. The shared experience of sex work often lowers defensive barriers and enables a relationship of trust to develop much more rapidly and effectively.'* (TAMPEP 2009a pg. 18)

Peer education and peer support initiatives involving online sex workers were identified by some services involved in BtG. The Matrix Project, Norfolk had utilised a peer support approach in its work with online and indoor sex workers, having built links and trust amongst a section of sex workers in the Norfolk area via netreach and face to face community development work. The project hosted consultation meetings hosted with sex workers for people interested in forming a network and to discuss the model for the service. This was held in a private location, as advised by peer supporters, and discussion focused on what the service could look like and how to implement peer support and education. The group went on to develop the network.

Sex worker led organisations in the UK and Ireland, such as **English Collective of Prostitutes (ECP)**, **Sex Worker Advocacy and Resistance Movement (SWARM)**, **SCOT-PEP**, **Umbrella Lane**, **X:talk**, and **Sex Workers Alliance Ireland (SWAI)** involve sex workers across their organisations and incorporate sex worker led and peer approaches to their information, support, advocacy and organising work.

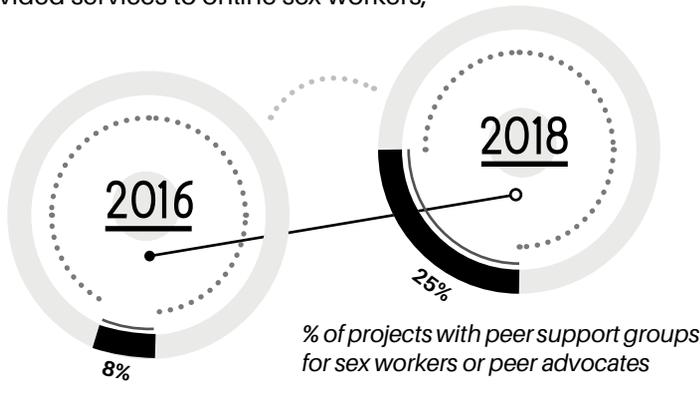
- An example related specifically to online sex work. X:talk
- in 2018 offered a range of sex worker led workshops on
- topics such as: screening for in and outcalls and website
- development and internet anonymity.

## Sex worker involvement in projects: BtG findings and sharing practice

BtG found that the level of sex worker involvement in projects and services for online sex workers who took part in BtG varied greatly. There was a spectrum of involvement;



In the BtG surveys, many projects recognised sex worker involvement as a good practise principle. From the projects who provided services to online sex workers;



Further examples of sex worker inclusion and peer initiatives in the netreach context are included in Section 4.



**Two examples of projects in the UK who contributed to BtG that take an approach committed to meaningful involvement of sex workers are shared here:**

**Umbrella Lane (UL)** is a sex worker-led service based in Glasgow, providing services and support to sex workers across and visiting Scotland.

UL are committed to a rights-based approach and its mission is to *'improve the health and well-being of all sex workers in Scotland, through a community-based, innovative and holistic approach that recognises our agency and choices in starting sex work, managing work and sometimes moving on from sex work'*.

*In its initial consultation with sex workers, UL found key things sex workers wanted were:*

- Community involvement and sex worker meaningful involvement; prevention tools i.e. condoms, lubricants; working supplies, i.e. sponges.
- Immediate warnings and checks with one another on bad clients.
- Support in reporting violence and abuse to the police.
- Peer support.
- Advice on keeping safe at work.
- Advice and support as sex working parents and holistic therapies, including a sex worker retreat.

They endeavour to develop services in response to these and other emergent needs. Their work takes place in a challenging context where funding is precarious and limited. As well as providing such services they advocate for sex worker rights and carry out work to influence policy and law related to sex work. For further info: [www.umbrellalane.co.uk](http://www.umbrellalane.co.uk)

**TransActions (TA)** is an initiative developed with the support of National Ugly Mugs, Newcastle and Northumbria Universities which has included transgender sex workers (TSWs) from its inception. It aims to:

- Provide an opportunity for TSWs to share experiences and offer one another advice online.
- Promote inclusion and participation of TSWs in services, linking practitioners and TSWs to inform best practise and expertise.
- Recognition of the complexity and diversity of TSWs' experiences in research and policy.

TA has flagged how many TSWs work independently online and can contribute to the development of online resources for internet sex workers that take on board the needs of TSWs. TransActions advocates the inclusion of TSWs in services, tapping into knowledge, expertise and supporting community empowerment. In workshops held as part of TA, the initiative has identified how TSW can be excluded or not represented under a violence against women and girls policy and service provision agenda. They use a "nothing about us without us" message to ensure TSW's voices are heard in discussion.

TA has highlighted how some TSWs can feel marginalised as trans people in people in sex worker circles and as a sex worker in trans circles, as well

as some HIV and health spaces. TA promotes non-judgemental support for people transitioning and for transgender sex workers, including open dialogue with practitioners. TA stresses that practitioners should be trained, sensitive and non-judgmental and create safe spaces for disclosure so the most effective support can be provided. TA also stresses the importance of recognising diversity amongst trans sex workers, including trans-masculine identities and advise that resources for TSWs should reflect this diversity.

Transgender sex workers were involved in the initial development of the projects website <http://transactions.space/>, which will act as a hub for other outcomes from Transactions, including various resources.

In a workshop led by Umbrella Lane and TransActions on sex worker involvement at a BtG event to consult on this guidance, the following key points were raised:

## Recognition of skills/knowledge and advantages of inclusion

- Sex worker led projects tend to have the trust of the communities they serve and can give ownership to sex workers, which can be empowering. Word of mouth endorsement is important in online spaces and hence peer champions and peer approaches can harness this. Projects can work with sex workers who are active within online peer networks and support groups who can circulate information and updates about services and champion projects.

- Projects can benefit from working with online sex worker forums and communities, as they have established networks. Some forums welcome and create space or membership for health and support services. It is important such spaces are respected and services ensure they follow the rules of engagement set by the sex worker community, for example only posting in service provision threads if that is what has been agreed.



- Current and former sex workers bring a range of valuable skills and knowledge to staff, volunteer, peer mentor, advisor, consultant and trustee board teams.

## Strategy

- Projects should have strategies and policies for sex worker inclusion in their organisation and may benefit from action plans with clear outcomes which are regularly reviewed, with progress assessed.

- Utilise skills in fundraising to work in partnership with local sex work organisations or groups, to raise money for initiatives for online sex workers.

## Employment and volunteering

- Projects should aim to develop strong links with OLSWs in their area consulting about what is wanted and how to support and enable involvement. Reaching out and doing the ground work helps build trust and credibility, this will take time and requires sensitivity.

- Volunteering and training programs should be open to include sex workers, projects may consider how they are proactively promoting volunteering and mentoring opportunities for sex workers, ensuring appropriate support for those who get involved.

- Employ people with online sex worker experience in teams, including as advisers/consultants about planning, design and development of services

which are inclusive of online sex workers.

- Sex workers can be part of teams delivering netreach activity. Several contributing projects have current and former online sex workers within netreach teams (as paid or unpaid staff) working to organisational netreach protocols and all other policies. Some sex workers are more tech savvy than some project workers - it can be good to recognise and draw on these skills.



- Promote meaningful involvement by ensuring sex workers are equipped, trained (where needed) and supported to participate in all roles they take on. This is important to avoid tokenistic sex worker involvement which can be exploitative of sex workers' experiences.

- Projects need to consider how they will compensate sex workers for their labour and contributions to designing, developing and delivering projects and initiatives, in whatever role/s they have. At a time when budgets are stretched it becomes even more important that the costs for sex worker participation is written into funding grant and other applications. This gives projects the opportunity to address any inequity, for example when sex workers are represented on advisory groups voluntarily with other members paid in their professional capacity.

## Online resources and initiatives for online sex workers

- Sex workers should be involved in the planning and development of websites and other resources for online sex workers, such initiatives provide opportunities for interested sex workers to utilise knowledge and tech skills.

- Involve sex workers in establishing and leading peer support groups, networks or other initiatives for online workers.

- Create free spaces and in-kind support for sex worker led peer support and advocacy.

## Representation and Heterogeneity

- For projects to represent and include sex workers from different sectors and with a range of experiences they need to work across a continuum, understand sex workers are a heterogenous groups and so will approach services with varying degrees of desire or ability to be involved (in terms of both structural barriers and service design barriers).

## Person-centre and resilience approaches

- Working from a person centred, resilience or solution focused approach in the delivery of advisory and support services- rather than purely a victim-based model - offers an inclusive way of working and provides a framework which recognises all experiences and needs.

## Privacy and confidentiality

- An important issue to consider is privacy and confidentiality when including people with sex work experience in peer initiatives and wider service design, management and delivery, as volunteers or paid workers. It is important that mechanisms are in place for ensuring their privacy and agreed protocols should be in place and followed, including if any breaches occur for sex worker volunteers and paid staff. How open people are about their current or former sex work, to whom, and within which settings will vary for individuals. Projects need to ensure they do not put people in a position where their privacy is jeopardised. Services need to consult with sex workers at the start of the process of involvement and discuss policies which are designed to enable volunteering or working within the organisation 'safely'.

- Projects need to give clear information to service users that all volunteers and staff adhere to the organisations confidentiality policy.

## Research, monitoring and evaluating

- Monitoring and evaluating the level and effectiveness of participation/involvement is important. It can highlight barriers to inclusion and can be used as evidence for effectiveness of inclusive models in funding applications.

- Involve sex worker in research, mappings, needs assessment and evaluations within participatory approaches as part of the research team.

*N.B. Your practice should always be in line with your organisational policy.*

## 2.3 Skills and knowledge for netreach

Based on findings from project surveys, sex worker interviews, sharing in the BtG Practitioners Group and a workshop held at the BtG consultation event held as part of the ESRC Science Festival November 2017 we now summarise the skills and knowledge that were identified as beneficial in providing netreach support for online sex workers.

### Appropriate skills and knowledge

- Sex workers in BtG made it clear that individuals or teams offering info, advice and support need to have a range of appropriate skills and experience relevant to supporting sex workers. This includes knowledge of issues relevant to those working online, for example, sexual health; the law relating to online sex work and its regulation; self-employment; supporting sex workers who have been victims of crime and their options for reporting; local services; support to sex workers regarding managing duality; and other areas that may arise.
- Having up to date knowledge about key law and policy regarding the online sector across the team enables those working with OLSWs to provide basic information. Yet more specialist advice regarding certain areas of law such as immigration laws and taxes should only be given by those with specialist legal expertise.
- Familiarity with online sex work spaces, platforms, applications and social media (including its use by sex workers) and knowledge about the online sector. Having current or former online sex workers in netreach teams can make a valuable contribution to the knowledge within the team regarding such things as online spaces and platforms, use of social media, apps and terminology. Such team members also bring voices of authenticity and knowledge about the sector.
- Computer and digital technology literacy to at least a level which enables delivery of netreach activities. Those involved in netreach who have higher levels of tech literacy, can support with development and training other team members.
- There is also a need for cultural competency in relation to specific online work environments and awareness of language and communication in a chat environment. (See also INDOORS 2014b)
- Having people with language skills other than English in the team can also be very advantageous, given the proportion of migrant sex workers in the online sector in some areas of the UK. Depending on the languages spoken by key migrant workers working in the local sex industry, projects may proactively recruit staff or volunteers who have certain languages to be involved in netreach activities. Online platforms, apps, and agencies which may be utilised by people of certain nationalities should also be recognised.

## Communication skills

- Good communications skills with a friendly and informal but professional manner as well as being comfortable with online communication. Projects involved in netreach have netreach protocols which should guide on manner, messaging and professional practice online.
- Staff and volunteers who understand and utilise empowering language.
- INDOORS (2014b) advised that team members working online should have proficiency in the dynamics of online communications: where there can be fast-paced discussions and communication patterns, difficult topics can be raised. To help, staff and volunteers would benefit from training on social media behaviour and developing skills to prioritise relevant issues.

## Training

- Alongside standard organisational training regarding policies and practice, staff and volunteers should receive training specifically regarding online sex work, netreach guidance/protocols (which should include professional practice online) and the tools/platforms that the project will be using.

## Understanding of confidentiality

- A good understanding of the importance of confidentiality, anonymity and privacy for sex workers alongside organisational confidentiality policies. Whilst it is important and helpful to inform potential service users that your service is confidential in online straplines and banners, it is equally important to let them know that as with all health and outreach interactions not everything *can* be confidential as some matters present safeguarding issues and become subject to safeguarding practice. Many health, outreach and support workers are practised in face-to-face or phone interactions when clarifying the boundaries to confidentiality, but it can be harder to do this online. Having a clear confidentiality statement on your website where you can direct sex workers to find out more about your service and confidentiality approach would be useful.

## Consistency and coordination

- Experienced outreach workers noted the need to be consistent rather than persistent with any type of reaching out. Ensuring messaging is not invasive or hard selling is important. Sex workers may be aware of online information, but it might not be the right time for them to contact and utilise the project's services, some might want to at a later date. Ensure your approach enables people to feel empowered and safe to access services on their terms. It often takes time to build trust and credibility with sex workers due to a range of factors including the stigma people encounter and the discrimination or judgement some may have faced in other services. This can be even more of a challenge in a virtual environment (INDOORS 2014b).
- Coordination and consistency of staff/volunteers where possible. Projects providing netreach services have found having a degree of consistency and continuity of the staff/volunteers involved in netreach helps a team build their experience. If a team of people contribute, having a named coordinator can help.

See section 4 for regulations related to electronic communication.



## Non-judgemental approach

- Teams should have a non-judgemental approach and recognise that sex workers experiences and needs will be varied.

*'Be sure of your message & the support you have to offer and ensure that support is non-judgemental. Be patient it can take time to build relationships whether online or face to face. Be discreet.'* (Outreach/netreach worker, project survey 1).

## Flexibility

- Some online workers will want face-to-face support of some kind; services will be more accessible if they can be flexible in delivering such via community based outreach, with workers able to travel to meet people. Hence services need to offer flexibility and the ability to deliver in different locations, whilst following relevant organisational lone worker policies, if lone working is offered. INDOORS (2014b) have also stressed the need for flexibility.

## Referral and partnership

- Willingness to build relationships with partner agencies, knowledge of local services and online information resources will ensure appropriate signposting and referral. Some services maintain directories of links to local services websites and other online resources in readiness for requests.

## Ethical principles

- INDOORS (2014b) advised that those involved in netreach need to understand five ethical principles:
  - The right to be treated with dignity (human rights approach).
  - The right to self-determination.
  - The right to make informed choices.
  - The principles of social justice.
  - Respect for privacy, confidentiality and data protection.

These are important for projects and organisations to take on board.

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# 3. Planning for Netreach and learning about the online sector

## 3.1 Strategy and protocols for Netreach

Correlation (2011) identified several factors required for high-quality internet services including recognising that internet-based services are part of professional outreach, advice counselling and support services and those delivering these should do so in line with professional regulations and requirements. They warn against services starting to work through online platforms *'without a comprehensive methodological and ethical approach'*.

The INDOORS (2014b) project workstream around the use of information technologies in sex work support looked at how to integrate online outreach into the wider outreach framework for organisations. Information sharing in the BtG practitioners group and learning from INDOORS (2014b) has shown how organisations need a strategy before implementing netreach, which is based on local context, capacity and the online tools they have access to.

INDOORS (2014b pg. 76) provided a very useful framework for such a strategy, which grew from partnership learning work with projects across a range of European countries. Each partner taking part in the initiative developed strategies under four areas: their goals for use of ICT tools, the socio-legal context of the local situation, the chosen ICT tools and division of labour i.e. how the work would be carried out. The INDOORS report provides a summary of each organisation's strategy (2014b pg. 28) which they advise that organisations follow as part of their strategic development of netreach provision:

### ○ Background information

What does the organisation know already about the target group and their needs? What is the social and political context?

### ○ Concrete mission

What does the organisation want to accomplish by using ICT tools? What is the end goal?

### ○ Sources

Who else might have relevant information? Who might know how to collect further information if needed?

### ○ Target group

Who is the organisation trying to reach by using ICT tools and why? Does the target group want to be reached by the organisation? What is the benefit?

### ○ Choosing ICT tools

What kind of ICT tool(s) will the organisation use and why? Which ICT tools will be best for reaching the target group? What makes the chosen method(s) potentially better for this purpose?

### ○ Ensuring sufficient resources

Does the organisation have the necessary knowledge and skills, or is training needed before starting? What training structure should be used to maintain knowledge capital?

### ○ Division of labour

How will the concrete division of tasks be organised? How many workers will there be, and how will administration be taken care of? When, how often and for what duration will the ICT tools be used? For instance, what day of the week and time of day will staff/volunteers be online, and for how long?

### ○ Data collection and indicators

What data will the organisation collect to evaluate the project, and how? They give examples such as assessing the need for services, the number of service users, the duration of contact, the main topics discussed, the usefulness and effectiveness of the organisation's work and collecting feedback from people who use the service.

### ○ Timetable and follow up

Set a timetable for evaluation and/or smaller assessments and decide how to proceed informed by these.

### ○ Occupational health and safety

Has there been risk assessment? Have the safety rules been agreed? Is there clinical supervision and is it adequate for online work?

Correlation (2011) advises that online service provision should involve thorough planning and service design which includes:

- Information about which groups the service is targeting  
.....
- Why the service needs to be provided through the internet and how  
.....
- A plan for how the work will be organized  
.....
- How occupational health issues of the staff are taken care of  
.....
- Who is in charge of the administration?  
.....
- Feedback and evaluation planned  
.....
- Who is responsible for the service quality?  
.....
- How will it follow professional code of conduct, quality standards and an ethical framework?  
.....
- Involving the target group from the planning phase and continued involvement through the whole service provision process, enabled by online dialogue and acknowledgement of community expertise.  
.....

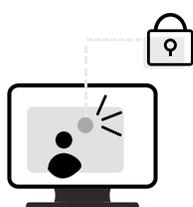
## Organisational policies and Netreach protocols

The projects who took part in BtG and had carried out netreach for some years stressed that policies which apply to other areas of the service should apply to online provisions, for example, risk assessments, confidentiality and safeguarding policies, as well as having policies specifically for netreach.

Also, some of the online platforms that netreach workers will use for legitimate netreach purposes may contravene the IT security policies of larger umbrella organisations. For example, accessing adult services platforms may breach policies which prohibit accessing online platforms with sexually explicit material on work PCs. Managers of staff using project/service IT facilities to access such platforms must ensure there is organisational authorisation to do so and that access and practice is within the boundaries of agreed netreach policy and practice.

As with other forms of outreach, netreach should be conducted within a set of netreach guidance/protocols. Most of the projects in BtG who carried out netreach had such protocols. Netreach activity is subject to all the other organisational policies that a project should have in place for example confidentiality and safeguarding; this should be made clear in netreach protocols. Typically protocols/guidance cover the following:

- Clear guidance on conduct for netreach workers.
- Provide guidance on content for initial SMS or email message to be sent to new people who enquire generally about the service. Some projects have introductory text to use.
- Guidance about promotional messaging on various platforms the project is active on. Some projects agree and have standard messaging to be used. Some will have specific campaigns or topics that they are promoting over certain periods of time.
- Details of how netreach activity should be recorded.
- Provide guidance on the policies netreach workers should work within.
- Netreach should be conducted within health and safety policies and protocols and should address particular health and safety matters relevant for staff, volunteers and people who access the service.



### Safeguarding

.....

Staff or volunteers who, in the course of conducting netreach, become aware of a safeguarding concern should follow their organisation's safeguarding procedures, recording and retaining the information as appropriate within the context of safeguarding legislation.



## Training

.....  
All involved in netreach, whether they be staff, volunteers, have sex work experience or not, need training and induction. This should involve core training, specialist training for the role (including training in methods used for netreach), with continuing professional development, maintaining skills and updating knowledge. Initial and periodic update training should be provided for staff and volunteers involved in netreach. Some projects found regular team meetings with all those involved in netreach were beneficial for coordination, shared learning and reflective practice.



## Supervision and support

.....  
Staff and volunteers should be given adequate supervision and administrative support in line with the organisation’s policies.

## Mainstreaming, resourcing and staffing netreach

BtG’s work with practitioners has highlighted that netreach activities can get pushed aside if they are seen as an add on to practice, they need to be built into the service as core activity. Netreach needs to be part of the project rota just like outreach and community development sessions to physical locations such as street scenes, bars, clubs, flats, parlours etc. Through its surveys, Practitioners Group and networking activities, BtG found a range of approaches to netreach in terms of staffing.

In some cases, one outreach or support worker took a lead in carrying out netreach as part of their wider work, or a volunteer carried out netreach which had not yet become embedded in mainstream practice for the staff team. There were other projects where a small team of outreach workers and volunteers carried out netreach as part of a coordinated approach and this supported wider work with online sex workers. The advantages of this approach were that it brought a wider mix of skills and knowledge, usually enabled more netreach and lead to a more integrated netreach approach.

This latter approach was more common in projects for whom ehealth and advice methods tended to have been delivered for some years, and were, therefore, more mainstreamed and embedded in practice. This was the case for those working with LGBTQ sex workers, although not exclusively, and projects working with female sex workers were increasingly prioritising netreach in recognition of the significance of the online sector. One project had secured funding for a post that involved netreach activity as part of the job description.



### Practice Point

Whether an individual or team carries out netreach activities, a degree of continuity was identified as important so that skills are developed and familiarity with online spaces is maintained, which creates the ability to spot trends and changes. Similarly, coordination and communication between team members was seen as very important.

Other projects did not have the resources and capacity to do this. There were different views on whether having one lead or a team approach was better. As with many things having a balanced approach with a lead who coordinates and maintains focus but who also supports others in delivering netreach, which brings additional skills and knowledge, perhaps gives the best of both worlds.

.....  
Online and digital methods of contacting service users and providing support are likely to become further mainstreamed. Projects managers, in business planning and service development work, need to consider this in their service development plans and the implications for paid and volunteer role descriptions. Some projects have already added digital engagement, netreach and netreach related activities (such as using social media to promote services and communicate with service users) as core duties within outreach worker and other job descriptions. As services embrace and embed a range of ICT approaches into service promotion and delivery, the duties and skills required for staff and volunteer roles need to be aligned to support these. For example, if a service is to offer a live chat function it will most likely require a range of staff and volunteers to support this.

During the course of BtG some projects started to formally dedicate team members’ time to netreach and a small number had developed funding bids to support netreach activity. For example, POW Nottingham started netreach in 2014 and increased their netreach activities when they got a grant for 6 months from a local funding source in 2016 to learn more

about the needs of workers in the online sector and to develop these services. This led to a larger number of online sex workers accessing POW, including some migrant workers. Subsequently a Big Lottery Fund Reaching Communities grant partly funds POW's wider netreach, which is also supported by the Lloyds Bank Foundation.

This raises the issue of resourcing as INDOORS (2014b) notes *'Even if most applications are free of charge, this does not mean that working in an ICT environment is free of charge'* (pg. 20). Projects need to factor netreach costs into funding plans, which includes training costs to build and update skills, staff and volunteer costs and supervision. Human resources need to be dedicated to netreach activities to keep online information up to date and to maintain a fresh and active presence and to respond to sex workers queries through the various online channels that it uses. INDOORS recommended that ICT advocacy work needs *'administrative support and structure'* and stated:

*'Without organisational commitment or recourse, ICT service provisions and advocacy work are doomed to fail.'* (pg. 21)

In the BtG Practitioners group a number of projects set a regular date and time for netreach activities to take place for structure and consistency and to ensure that netreach related activities were not eroded. This was seen to be particularly important if the project was making team members available for some sort of live chat service as it would ensure that there were people on hand to staff this and the provision would be supported.



### 3.2 Learning about the online sector

Those involved in developing and delivering netreach should be aware, and have an understanding, of online sex work in their area including:

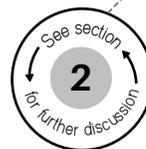
- An awareness of the issues online sex workers face & the context they work within.
- The extent of online sex work in the area a project serves.
- The diverse health and wider information & support needs of those in the sector.
- The platforms and technology online sex workers use for marketing, peer support, safety & advocacy.

This knowledge should inform decisions about whether a project can offer information and support services, the level of service needed, where to promote services and wider service planning and delivery. Being informed about which platforms and methods of communication sex workers use should help inform the project's digital presence and other netreach activities should be configured to make sure people become aware of their services in an appropriate and non-invasive manner.

INDOORS (2014b) provide practical tips for deciding where, how, who, what and when e-outreach should be provided. To find out where to be active and deliver netreach, they suggest:

- Searches of the internet using different key words to learn about, and search for, potential platforms to conduct netreach.
- Asking sex workers and involving them from the start in planning.

Sex worker involvement, peer approaches and community empowerment generally are discussed in section two.

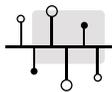


Including sex workers in initiatives and approaches to learn about the online sector and the needs of people within it has many advantages and is a good practice approach.

Other key tips for netreach planning include: ask sex workers to advise on what is the best and most respectful way to approach the scene, observe spaces at regular intervals to identify trends, patterns and changes, choose a limited number of websites to start outreach work, be clear about staffing, timing and impacts on other services. In addition, projects must decide who is the target group: is it certain cohorts of sex worker who are less in contact with the service, those who do not know about it or those who do not want to or cannot access existing services?

#### Practice Point

**INDOORS** (2014b) advise that decisions on which platforms and ICT methods projects use will be dependent on resources and the communities that they are working with. In deciding which tools to use, projects should consider which are best for reaching your target group, focus on one or a limited selection (which you have resources to maintain) and have realistic goals which you are prepared to adjust.



## Mapping

BtG found that a range of stakeholders are increasingly carrying out 'mappings' of online sex work, and drew attention to some of the ethical and methodological challenges. BtG found mapping can mean different things; it can be an attempt to identify and count platforms used for marketing, count and estimate the number of online sex workers in a particular area, or look at a range of geographical and socio-economic aspects of sex worker populations, for example, using sex worker marketing profiles to look at the age (advertised), nationality or geographical profile of a sex worker population. The BtG research found that some police forces were actively mapping online spaces, sometimes as part of actions to identify victims of modern slavery. This link between mapping and policing makes many sex workers suspicious, fearing identification by the police, disruption to business and enforcement activity.

The Global Network of Sex Work Projects (2015) advised organisations to 'Proceed with Extreme Caution' in its policy briefing *'Mapping and Population Size Estimates of Sex Workers'*. As well as providing detailed information about such mappings and estimates, the different types, and the implications for sex workers, this briefing considers some of their advantages and problems, including ethical concerns.



## Ethics

BtG advises that any organisation considering or carrying out mappings should take care and consider ethical and methodological issues to ensure mapping is not invasive and respects the privacy and confidentiality of sex workers. At a time when projects, researchers, the police and others can easily access marketing data about sex workers, ethical issues around how the activity will impact on, and be perceived by, sex workers are paramount. It is important to ask whether the mapping is necessary or whether it is driven more by satisfying 'the curiosity of the researcher' (Longo 2004). Services working with sex workers are often approached to contribute to such endeavours. Projects are, therefore, in a position to assess and advocate for ethical approaches.

### **Sex worker involvement:**

The 'Sex Worker Implementation Tool' (SWIT) offers a set of guidance for the implementation of HIV/STI programmes with sex workers, published by the World Health Organisation and other agencies. It makes a series of recommendations to researchers and projects about conduct when carrying out mapping exercises which are relevant for all sex worker programs, including involving sex workers in the process and that confidentiality must be ensured (World Health Organisation et al., 2013).

Participatory approaches can be used to carry out mapping activities, providing an opportunity for sex workers to lead or work collaboratively as part of support



See the BtG briefing 'Mapping the Online Sex Industry' here: [www.beyond-the-gaze.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/BtGbreifingmapping.pdf](http://www.beyond-the-gaze.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/BtGbreifingmapping.pdf)

There are situations in which mapping can be useful, for example, it can inform the provision and availability of sex work health and support services when little is already known about the online sector in an area. Mapping is sometimes carried out by sex work support services or health projects, to identify unmet needs in terms of service provision and support among sex workers (Global Network of Sex Work Projects 2015). Mapping can inform decisions about the online spaces projects will utilise to promote their services to workers in the online sector, how they will make contact with online sex workers and learning about peer and other resources for sex workers in their area.

.....

and advocacy teams. As well as this being an approach which contributes to community empowerment, online sex workers will bring prior knowledge and understanding about online spaces used by sex workers which means mappings can be carried out more quickly and more comprehensively. Of course, the knowledge people will bring will be variable in the sense that people will understand better the spaces they use or are familiar with. Some people will be more active than others on online sex worker forums and private groups, others will be less so. This diversity in knowledge, however, applies to all people be they sex workers, project workers, researchers or those with intersecting identities. So, it is always important to bear this in mind when enabling involvement and aim for a mix of experiential, knowledge and skill sets in the team. This principle also applies to needs assessment, which is discussed later in this section.

The SWIT (WHO 2013) highlights the need to be careful in terms of how the mapping data may be used by others, for example, if locations or spaces have been identified in spatial mappings these could be used by the authorities or local vigilantes to identify sex work venues and disrupt or close these. They also advise those conducting such exercises to remain alert to the risk that findings may be misused by other parties which may undermine sex worker safety or privacy and the trust and credibility of your service.

.....

## Methods

*BtG has highlighted various methodological issues which are useful for organisations to consider;*

- Estimating the size of the community from counts of public facing advertising is limited, such counts do not necessarily translate into the number of sex workers actively working because many of the adverts may be out of date and no longer active, yet still appear online.
- Be aware of and be transparent about the limits to mapping generally and the specific methods adopted. So for example stress the 'estimated' nature of any counts.
- Be aware that sex workers have diverse advertising and marketing practices. While there are clear market leaders in terms of online sex work platforms, this does not mean that they are universally used by all sex workers.
- It is difficult to identify all online platforms where sex workers advertise given their internationalisation, their diversity (with many sites including highly diversified local sites covering towns or regions in the UK) and also the constantly fluid terrain, with new platforms often emerging or being used.
- Obtaining data from several platforms can help to include a wider range of sex workers' profiles in the population size estimate but that then presents another methodological challenge - multiple counting of the same sex workers appearing across different platforms. As many people advertise in more than one space there can be repeat profiles on different platforms.
- Socio-demographic data contained in profiles needs to be approached carefully as marketing data is not necessarily an accurate statement or measure of a range of factors, such as age and nationality. Again, be open about this limitation.
- Sex work is often advertised online in a covert fashion in some spaces. For example, on some dating and hook up platforms, where commercial sex profiles are not permitted by sites and apps in their terms and conditions, sex work is still advertised using a variety of codes and signals. BtG found this was particularly the case for a cohort of male sex workers advertising services to men. It may, therefore, be difficult for those unfamiliar with these spaces to recognise and include in any population size estimate the sex workers advertising in these spaces.



### **Practice Point**

Whilst projects will want to be aware of specific local trends and spaces, some of these will overlap with the existing work by those in other regions of the UK. Hence prior to mapping, projects can learn from existing published mapping reports, can network with staff from other services who have carried these out and speak with local sex workers. National Ugly Mugs website <https://www.uglymugs.org> contains details of projects who work with sex workers in the UK and can advise on projects in the UK.

Projects in the same town or region could consider working together to carry out joint mapping, the advantages being more effective use of resources, recognition that online sex workers often work in towns and cities across a region and this can be a check against over mapping and intrusiveness.

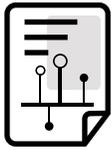
Amongst projects who participated in BtG, the most straight forward online mapping began with online searches, using google or other search engines to look up words such as escort, sex worker, transgender escorts, male escorts, female escort. Specifying the town, city or region that your project is working in will narrow down searches. This will often provide links to the sorts of online platforms described in section 1.4. On some sites, it is possible to search profiles of workers advertising on the platform and an automated total is provided. Others do not have this function and require manual counting.

On some platforms, sex workers profiles are open to the public and registration is not required in order to view and search profiles. Projects need to decide whether they register and set up profile information. The majority of projects taking part in BtG Practitioners group who registered did so openly including, adhering to principles of transparency and were clear that staff or volunteers were there in a professional capacity representing their project/organisation. Hence, organisational policy required organisational profiles which were overt not covert. This identifies the organisation and protect people using platforms. It also clearly directs staff and volunteers that they are in an organisation capacity and must work within organisational codes of conduct and policies.

Searches can be systematised, for example, by recording the top 20 results, then searching on each platform, making counts and recording key data . The number of platforms that can be searched and analysed will be shaped by the organisational resources and staff/volunteer time. Similarly, if a total count is being made, cross checking 'working names' and scrutinising platform information to identify a person advertising on more than one site is advisable, but whether this method is adopted will depend on time that can be allocated. If this is not carried out, be transparent about this, the possibility of repeat profiles and also that the same person may have more than one profile in a different name.

Some projects choose to focus their searches and mapping for their area on specific platforms where they have identified higher numbers of workers from their area advertising.

The level of staff/volunteers capacity, resources and time available to carry out mappings shapes the scope of such endeavours, and being clear about the methodology, boundaries and limitation of the exercise is, therefore, important.



## Recording information from mappings

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which came into force in May 2018, means projects can still use online platforms and spaces to learn about the online scene in their area (as represented by marketing profiles) and for mapping exercises but **they must be careful about what data they record**. They should not record, without consent, individual personal data; this means they should not record names, phone numbers, email addresses and full post codes. It is within the regulations to record the first part of post codes, the town/city where someone works, their given gender identity and given nationality, as these do not identify an individual.

Some projects find doing mapping at certain intervals and recording such data can help also in policy advocacy, for example to demonstrate that the online sector is a significant sector when policy is based only on street sex work. It may also assist projects to stay informed about key groups of migrant workers advertising online- always bearing in mind the limitations with profile information. as previously touched upon.

## Case studies of mappings

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### **Basis Sex Work Project, Basis Yorkshire**

As part of their ongoing wider community development work with indoor and online sex workers, Basis has, over the last three years, carried out an annual snapshot mapping of online sex workers in Leeds. This has been by staff and volunteers, including people with sex work community experience. This has complimented counts the project carries out on two popular platforms used by cis & transgender women escorts in Leeds as part of its regular outreach work. This has allowed Basis to identify if any new online spaces have emerged and to have awareness of those advertising services, recognising the limits to counting public facing profiles online. Basis are also advised by online sex workers who use their services and had current and former online sex workers in the netreach team. Basis netreach staff and volunteers have searched for the following key terms: Leeds escorts, Male escort Leeds, Female escort Leeds, Trans escort Leeds, Independent escort Leeds and Agency escort Leeds. The first five pages of sites identified were recorded in a spreadsheet (for example, for the search term Female Escort Leeds, the first five pages had 38 online spaces) noting name of site, web address, then if possible making a count of profiles and recording those. The mapping in 2017 confirmed that the two sites the project regularly carried out netreach on continued to have comparatively large numbers, but it also flagged other platforms being used by significant numbers of people who provide sexual services in Leeds. It also was a reminder of the size of the agency escort sector and led to netreach work reaching out through Twitter to agencies and individual agency workers. To better understand the level of webcamming amongst escorts who use a major advertising platform on which Basis have a profile, they carried out searches and analysis to identify the number of Leeds escorts overall; the number who webcammed and escorted and also the number of people in Leeds who just webcammed. This confirmed to the project that all staff and volunteers working with sex workers needed an understanding of webcamming as it was a key service provided by a section of escorts in Leeds. For several months, a postgraduate student paid intern supported this work as part of the netreach team, this was in partnership with Leeds University.

Some projects have obtained small grants to engage academics to carry out mappings for them. The Men's Room Manchester secured funding from a local community safety fund for a mapping to help the project be informed about the further move to online spaces for advertising, which they were hearing about on street outreach from male sex workers, so they could develop a better digital presence to promote their service to online male sex workers.

Furthermore, some projects include mappings as part of wider needs assessment.

### 3.3 Needs assessment

For over two decades needs assessment and being aware of local context has been identified as good practice for working with sex workers (EUROPAP 1998, WHO 2013, Home Office 2016).

*'Sex workers face diverse legal, political, social and health environments. Sex work may be criminalized or an accepted occupation; it may be predominantly establishment-based or street-based. Sex workers may be undocumented migrants, highly mobile or selling sex in their own locality' (WHO 2013 pg. 10)*

Needs assessment is important in informing services how they can provide what sex workers want and how these can be made accessible. Needs assessment is particularly important for sex workers, including the online sector because:

- Stereotypes abound about sex workers and those developing services may be influenced by those stereotypes.
  - Those developing services may only have experience of working with people in one sector of the sex work community whose needs may be different in some ways from those in other sectors. In the UK some outreach and support service provisions work only, or predominantly, with street sex workers, or those experiencing homelessness and/or problematic substance use.
- The sex industry is constantly changing, new ways of working emerge, new needs may emerge, services may need to change how they deliver to be relevant and useful.

Internet based sex work is an example of a significant shift in working practices that has occurred over the last decade. BtG's work with projects notes that a significant number felt they had not yet adapted services to meet the needs of online sex workers. Some were commissioned only to work with street sex workers and their focus and resourcing remained related to street sex work. BtG also found in its interviews with online sex workers that some did not access specialist support services (in cases where they had such services in their area) and one of the reasons given was that they perceived those services as for sex workers in other sectors or with 'vulnerabilities they did not have'. Types of service provisions sex worker contributors to the BtG study felt could be relevant and useful to online sex workers are considered further in section 5.



As part of needs assessment, organisations should ensure they transparently and openly consider existing support in their area for people in the sector. If there is an organisation already providing specialist support for people in the online sector and they have expertise of the sector, organisations should seriously consider their rationale for wanting to develop additional services for this sector. Can they add complimentary resources or offer areas of specialism? If this is the case, consider whether it would be more effective to liaise with the existing service/s and offer to input such specialisms and discuss how to do

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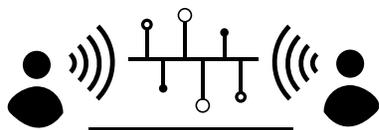
this in a coordinated way. Partnership working with an existing organisation may be the better way forward, with your organisation bringing complimentary support to that already available and fill any identified gaps.

There are considerations and concerns if you want to start specifically carrying out outreach in an area where another project already performs this role and they adhere to good practice. There is discussion amongst practitioners about the appropriate presence projects should have online in sex work spaces. Whilst having options/choice for people can be advantageous, it is also the case that fragmented, duplicated services can be confusing and not an efficient use of limited resources and this may heighten a sense of invasiveness felt by the sex work community.

With austerity and cuts to health and social care services in the UK statutory and charitable trust funds are squeezed. In this context, organisations need to ensure they apply for funding to meet unmet need and to consider if it is ethical and what is the justification to apply for a charitable trust funding or other funding sources if a service is already being provided by another organisation which adopts good practice.

In areas where there are no other services working with online sex workers, organisations considering developing support should consider if:

- Their organisation can offer something of relevance to people in the sector.
- Their staff or volunteers have the skills and knowledge to deliver services to people in the online sector.
- Their ethos and mission fits with delivering services which meet the needs of the online sector. Organisations need to be self-reflective and consider whether they are best placed to provide information and support for this sector.



For example, if your service is primarily focused on exiting/supporting people to leave the sex industry or for ‘vulnerable women’ you need to consider how your aims will be received by people in the online sector. This is not to imply that there are not people in the online sector who may want to access exit support or that there are not vulnerable people, there are. But it does mean that organisations should take on board research findings about what workers in the online sector want and their perceptions of the ‘support’ a project offers may be.

WHO (2013) noted that service delivery to sex workers is sometimes framed within a ‘violence against women and girls’ (VAWG) agenda, which focuses on exiting as the main goal over harm reduction. Sex workers who cannot or do not wish to exit at that time can feel this approach is victimising and not meeting their wider needs for information and support.

Several sex workers described how services in their area offered little for them: *‘They work with homeless people who use drugs and work on the streets, I’ve never been homeless, I’ve never used drugs, they don’t know anything about my work’.*

It is important to consider these matters and be open about the focus of your support and if there is a particular cohort of people in the online sector your service is aimed at, also to use sensitive and non-stigmatising language.

If your services need to overhaul their mission statement and retrain staff to make your service relevant you may not be the best organisation to carry out the work, or at least not to lead work with online sex workers. This does not mean your service may not be able to make a valuable contribution as part of collaboration, bringing specialist skills which will be much needed by certain cohorts of online sex workers.

**Useful questions to ask include:**

- Are there other organisations in the area whose resourcing and skills set better meets the needs of the online sector? For example, a sexual health promotion service or a service who works with migrant communities in areas where there are high numbers of migrants working in the sex industry.
- Would a collaborative approach be better?

## Planning and carrying out needs assessment .....

It is always important to assess needs to a) to make sure there is a need for some sort of service you are thinking of providing, and b) to find out what exactly it is that the people you are trying to reach want. It is important that all involved in a needs assessment are clear about **whose needs** are the focus of the needs assessment.

The needs of the target population rather than those of service providers should be the focus of needs assessment.

You need to be clear about:

- The aims of the needs assessment.
- Decide who will carry out the needs assessment. Consider whether additional assistance may be needed (e.g., with data collection, with data entry and analysis, with report writing, with experience of the online sex work), and get a commitment from the relevant people as soon as possible.

- Sometimes existing services/organisations are well placed to carry out needs assessment e.g. existing third sector projects, NHS sexual health services and sex worker led organisations who work with sex workers all may already have knowledge and expertise of needs assessment and research in their team. Sometimes external consultants with experience of needs assessments and setting up or developing sex work projects can help. Universities can be commissioned to work with organisations to carry out needs assessments. Also it is beneficial if external organisations bring knowledge about sex work and are aware and sensitive to the particular ethical issues when carrying out research with sex workers. Organisations without community links or involvement need to develop these before beginning a needs assessment.
- It is good practice to include sex workers in all stages of needs assessment, using participatory and collaborative approaches. A needs assessment provides an ideal opportunity for projects to develop or further include sex workers in their work as researchers, consultants or expert by experience advisors. Participatory action research models are recommended as good practice in needs assessment work with sex worker communities. Indeed, organisations may already have staff, volunteers, advisors or other supporters who are current or former sex workers who have needs assessment and wider research experience.

As well as identifying needs, it can be helpful for needs assessment processes and reports to:

- Estimate the cost and identify the source of funding for the needs assessment.
- Identify the appropriate overall approach to your needs assessment.
- Gather existing sources of information about the needs of the group of sex workers whose needs you want to identify. Consider what this information tells you about needs.
- Identify the services in your area that are already available to meet their needs? Consider sex worker peer networks? Consider the range of needs currently being met by these. What is the capacity of those services? Are they accessible?
- Consider the ways in which the needs assessment will obtain information and views of the wider sex work community in your area, about unmet health, safety and wider support needs.
- Ensure that information is analysed and interpreted, and that conclusions are drawn. Consider how those who gathered the information can be involved in the analysis, and how the results can be relayed back to all those who contributed to the process.
- Consider ethical issues carefully. In a needs assessment plan have a section on ethical considerations. Consider whether ethical approval is needed. If you are working with external evaluators ensure they are working to high ethical standards. Bowen (2006) produced a resource for community organisations which aimed to support them in ensuring sex workers *'are treated in accordance with established ethical principles when they are asked to participate in research'* to increase the quality of community based research and support community organizations to be full partners in research/evaluation. It provides a useful document for all involved in needs assessment, research or evaluation related to sex work.
- Once you have identified the needs of sex workers in your area, prioritise them to ensure better planning of local services and that limited resources go to the most pressing and extensive gaps exist. Develop an implementation plan that outlines how identified needs will be addressed with sex worker involvement and consultation as a core part of the process.



See Bowen's research guidelines here:  
[www.pace-society.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Community\\_Research\\_Guidelines.pdf](http://www.pace-society.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Community_Research_Guidelines.pdf)

As with mapping, any needs assessment and research must be in line with data protection law and regulations, including the General Data Protection Regulations which came into force in May 2018.



## Needs assessment: tools and approaches

Needs assessments can consist of small scale pieces of work to larger more comprehensive analysis. A range of methods and approaches can be used.

- Interviews: these can be face to face or by phone, skype, WhatsApp or other telecommunication apps and live chat tools.
- Online and offline surveys.
- Needs assessments can be linked to development of resources e.g. website information for online sex workers or a legal resource, production of online promotional materials, creation of an organisational WhatsApp group - all within a participatory framework.
- Focus groups.
- Visual and creative methods can be used as the focus or part of needs assessment work for example video/filmmaking work, photography and writing projects.

### ● Participatory action research and sex worker involvement:

- PAR is an approach rather than a specific method. PAR is concerned with process as well as outcomes. It is about working with communities and exchanging knowledge, in more ethical and inclusive, equitable ways in order to achieve change throughout the process.
- It is described by O'Neill and Webster (2005: 6) as a tool for 'mobilizing people's participation' via four elements: collective research; valuing all voices through democratic principles; producing and exchanging new knowledge; and action interventionism with change as part of the process.
- Participatory Action research is committed to having experiential researchers involved in planning, designing, carrying out, in leadership roles, analysing, forming recommendations, disseminating research/evaluation findings and working on impact actions.
- There has been recognition of the advantages of PAR approaches for sex work research for some years (Philips & Celia Benoit, 2005, Bowen 2006, O'Neill and Campbell 2006, Van der Meulen 2011). A participatory approach to evaluation and research brings various advantages: it brings sources of expert by experience knowledge and advice from the community into the process, brings access to sex worker networks and more inclusivity, is more effective at informing and shaping policy and practice change, it can be part of capacity and skills building, community development and self organising/support and part of wider strategies for meaningful sex worker involvement.



The Sex Work Research Hub (SWRH) is currently developing a practical resource on participatory action research and sex work, which will be published later in 2018. Keep an eye on their website: [www.york.ac.uk/sociology/research/current-research/swrh](http://www.york.ac.uk/sociology/research/current-research/swrh) blog: [www.swrh.co.uk/blog](http://www.swrh.co.uk/blog) and twitter: [@sexworkreshub](https://twitter.com/sexworkreshub) for news about publication and how to access.

Deciding what methods to use will be shaped by consultation and inclusion of sex workers, what particular areas of need you are looking at and the resources you have available to carry out needs assessment.

Evaluation and research work can be promoted in online spaces, some projects and researchers have used free or paid for banners or advertising space on platforms to promote needs assessment and research.

## Examples of needs assessment

MASH (Manchester) obtained a small grant and commissioned academics from a local university (Goldring et al. 2017) to carry out an assessment of 'the wellbeing needs of female online sex workers'. The objectives were:

- Perform an online audit of adult sites from which to gain a better understanding of the working environment of online sex workers.
- Examine what online support already exists for female sex workers.
- Develop and deliver an online survey exploring the needs and experiences of online sex workers.
- Conduct semi-structured interviews with sex workers who have experience of working online from which to provide a deeper understanding about the support needs of women in the sex work industry and any potential gaps in provision. (Goldring et al. pg. 9)

The methods they used were an online survey, semi structured interviews and online searches. Researchers found online sex workers formed socially supportive networks, 'Communities of Practice, where key skills and training were shared with others in the industry' and recommended MASH develop netreach and provide online and telephone support, as part of the supportive networks sex workers could draw on.

### 3.4 Monitoring and evaluation

As with other areas of work, projects need to establish a monitoring system, which collects routine data related to netreach, or monitoring data from this work needs to be incorporated into existing systems.

Review and evaluation is an important principle in the delivery and ongoing development of health, welfare and other support services to assess if people are using the services and whether the intended outcomes are being achieved. INDOORS (2014b) noted, in relation to the use of ICT for delivering outreach for sex workers, that the rate of technological innovation and change meant that some tools used may no longer be relevant. Periodic evaluation, therefore, is very important, and should be planned into service implementation plans.

It is also important to note that a range of other factors may impact on netreach and the needs of people in the sector. Law reform is just one example and may involve changes to the regulation of sex work or online adult service related platforms and content, or other regulatory changes such as to data protection regulations. For services to remain relevant, dynamic and effective, they need to periodically review their role.

INDOORS (2014b) recommend evaluations should be based on 'collectively agreed questions that are then periodically reviewed' (pg. 80) and should include perspectives of all the team members involved.

They provided a list of useful evaluation questions: (Extracted from page 80)

- Accessibility
- Is the organisation reaching the target group? What does the service user profile reveal about who is being reached and who is not? What kind of feedback have service users given?
- Efficacy
- What has been achieved by the method chosen relative to the resources that has been invested in it? Who would remain without services if this method of service provision was stopped? Is there a balance between the resources for service provision and the need for services?
- Analysis of the field
- Have there been changes that should be considered in service provision (such as legislation, new ethnic groups and the languages they need? Are there new technological applications or devices that have been influenced fundamental changes in the target groups behaviours?
- Need for change
- How can the service provider make potentially necessary changes? How will these changes be prioritised by the organisation as it adapts?
- Risks
- What are the central risks for the target group? What are the service providers main risks? What preparations have been made to deal with these risks?



[www.who.int/hiv/pub/sti/sex\\_worker\\_implementation/en](http://www.who.int/hiv/pub/sti/sex_worker_implementation/en)

Section six of **the World Health Organisation** (2013) toolkit on implementing HIV programmes for sex workers includes detailed guidance on data monitoring systems and planning for evaluation. Whilst these were produced for HIV programmes, there is useful learning for wider programmes, health and support services for sex workers. This guidance advised that in community empowerment programs for sex workers, monitoring and evaluation should not only include services provided and health and other outcomes achieved, but should also attempt to monitor and evaluate whether and to what extent the community empowerment process is occurring and they identify a range of indicators for this, including for example, whether sex worker led initiatives are progressing.

# 4. Netreach: using ICT to promote services and provide information/support

The way in which projects can use ICT to promote their services to OLSWs and how ICT can be used to provide information and advice services were key topics for discussion and practice sharing amongst practitioners.

It is important to be mindful that this area is governed by data protection regulations. This is not to put people off as there are lots that projects can and are doing, but it is important that project planning takes these issues into consideration. So before looking at the methods that projects involved in BtG were using, we will start this section with information about data protection.

## 4.1 Data Protection and Netreach

Data Protection and related legislation raises several issues for netreach, two key pieces of legislation you must consider when planning and be familiar with are:

- The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) which came into force on 25th May 2018 across the UK and replaces the Data Protection Act 2008.
- The Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations 2003 (PECR)



For further information see Information Commissioner's Office (2018) 'Guide to the General Data Protection Regulation' here: [www.assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/711097/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr-1-0.pdf](http://www.assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/711097/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr-1-0.pdf)

This legislation applies across the whole of the UK. PECR has been in place since 2003 and GDPR came into force recently and has attracted a lot more attention. Every public, private and charitable organisation, including projects within larger organisations such as the NHS etc. and unconstituted community groups are bound by this legislation. The Information Commissioners Office (ICO) is the body that regulates and enforces compliance. It is important to note that GDPR gives the regulatory authority power to levy very significant penalties for breach of the legislation.

The specific issue to consider in terms of Netreach is the



For further information see: [www.ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-pecr](http://www.ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-pecr)

concept of direct marketing. Direct marketing is covered by PECR. The ICO's guidance on PECR in relation to direct marketing via electronic mail states:

*"Organisations must not send marketing texts or emails to individuals without their **specific prior consent**. There is a limited exception for previous customers, known as the soft opt-in"* (ICO 2018b)

The ICO's 'Guidance on Direct Marketing' defines direct marketing as not being limited to advertising goods or services for sale. It also includes promoting an

organisation's aims and ideals: *'Direct marketing covers the promotion of aims and ideals as well as the sale of products and services. This means that the rules will cover not only commercial organisations but also not-for-profit organisations (e.g. charities, political parties etc.)'* (ICO 2018c). This implies that any unsolicited electronic contact with an online sex worker to make them aware of your service could be considered a breach of PECR.<sup>6</sup>

An example of an activity that could potentially put you in breach of PECR would be sending an unsolicited text to an online sex worker whose details you got from their profile informing them about your services or giving them specific information, i.e. telling them about a clinic. This applies regardless of where you find their information, e.g., classified advertisement platforms, hook up or dating apps, or adult services platforms. The fact that a person has put their information in the public domain does not give an organisation the right to contact them for the purposes of marketing, regardless of their intention.

Many projects have changed netreach practices because of raised awareness about PECR and the introduction of GDPR. Some projects previously identified key platforms for SW profiles then proactively messaged them through either SMS, internal messaging systems email etc. Most commonly, projects sent short introductory messages

<sup>6</sup> Current verbal advice received by projects involved in BtG, who have consulted the ICO, is that any unsolicited contact by any electronic means is a breach of PERC. But this is only advice and may be open to challenge. In this guidance we have erred on the side of caution, **projects should seek legal advice and ensure their governance structures are aware of the approach they adopt.**

with information about support offered, a link to their website and contact details. Projects had different approaches concerning how often to message, whether to focus only on new profiles and how often approaches should be made. Such unsolicited electronic contact could be seen as marketing and therefore unlawful under PECR. That was the case before GDPR, and it remains the case after GDPR. GDPR is primarily about the legal basis for processing, sharing and storing data etc, whereas PECR is about electronic marketing (including phone calls, emails and SMS).

Many projects who messaged sex workers would record for monitoring purposes information about those they had identified and messaged. Some organisations, whilst not messaging, still search key platforms, record data obtained from them to inform them about the scope of online sex work in their area, spaces people are advertising and socio-demographics of the community.

GDPR does not prevent organisations from recording data from platforms but provides a framework for projects to work within, this means personal data should not be recorded without the individuals consent. Personal data is that which could identify an **individual** (e.g. mobile phone numbers, emails, full name full postcodes, full date of birth).



### **Practice Point**

It is good practice for staff and volunteers to have access to your organisation's confidentiality statement and data protection statement both on paper and electronically, so they can easily send these to people directly when requested. These should be available on organisational websites.

REMEMBER as the Global Network of Sex Work Projects (2017) flagged when looking at sex work and ICT globally;

'Sex workers are understandably wary of being approached online by service providers. Firstly they stated that the internet is a space of work and they do not welcome being hassled with unsolicited messages while they are working' (pg. 17).

This point was also raised by some sex workers participating in BtG, but they expressed different views on the presence of projects in online spaces, some welcomed this if done sensitively, others remained critical of any contact. Laws on data protection and unsolicited electronic communication now draw boundaries around how all people can be contacted online, including sex workers. Such regulations provide a 'check' on practices which some sex workers see as intrusive. In all online sex work spaces, even in those where project presence is more passive, and consent has been given by the platform for a project presence, it is important that organisations are sensitive to the fact that many of the online spaces for sex workers are places related to work. Also, whilst some platforms and forums for sex workers permit project presence/membership, even if restricted to certain areas, organisations are there as invited guests.

### Legitimate Research and 'Sugging'

Organisations **can** contact individuals directly to conduct **genuine** research (for example if the purpose is to use market research to make decisions for commercial or public policy e.g. to understand the support needs of OLSWs in your area). Organisations can also contract or work in partnership with external researchers to conduct genuine research that involves contacting individuals directly. However, this is only permissible where it is for genuine research purposes and not for the purposes of marketing your service. Marketing disguised as research is known as 'selling under the guise of research' or 'Sugging' and is prohibited.

## 4.2 Online and digital marketing strategy

Having a strong and active online presence across a range of platforms which has information and content relevant for OLSWs increases the chances that people in the sector will become aware of your services and can access updates about the service, relevant information and support if they choose to. It increases the chances that sex workers can find information about your organisation when they do google searches to find projects active in their area.

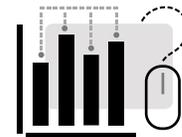
In terms of planning, projects need to decide which platforms they will use in their digital marketing strategy and netreach activity, choosing those which are most likely to reach their target group and match the resources they have. INDOORS (2014b) found that to have a marketing strategy that works it helps to: consider where your target population is and how to motivate them to use online services, cooperate with the sex work community, webmasters and other service providers, be aware that the needs of the population change as do ICT tools and, therefore, services and netreach workers need to be adaptable.



## Practice Point

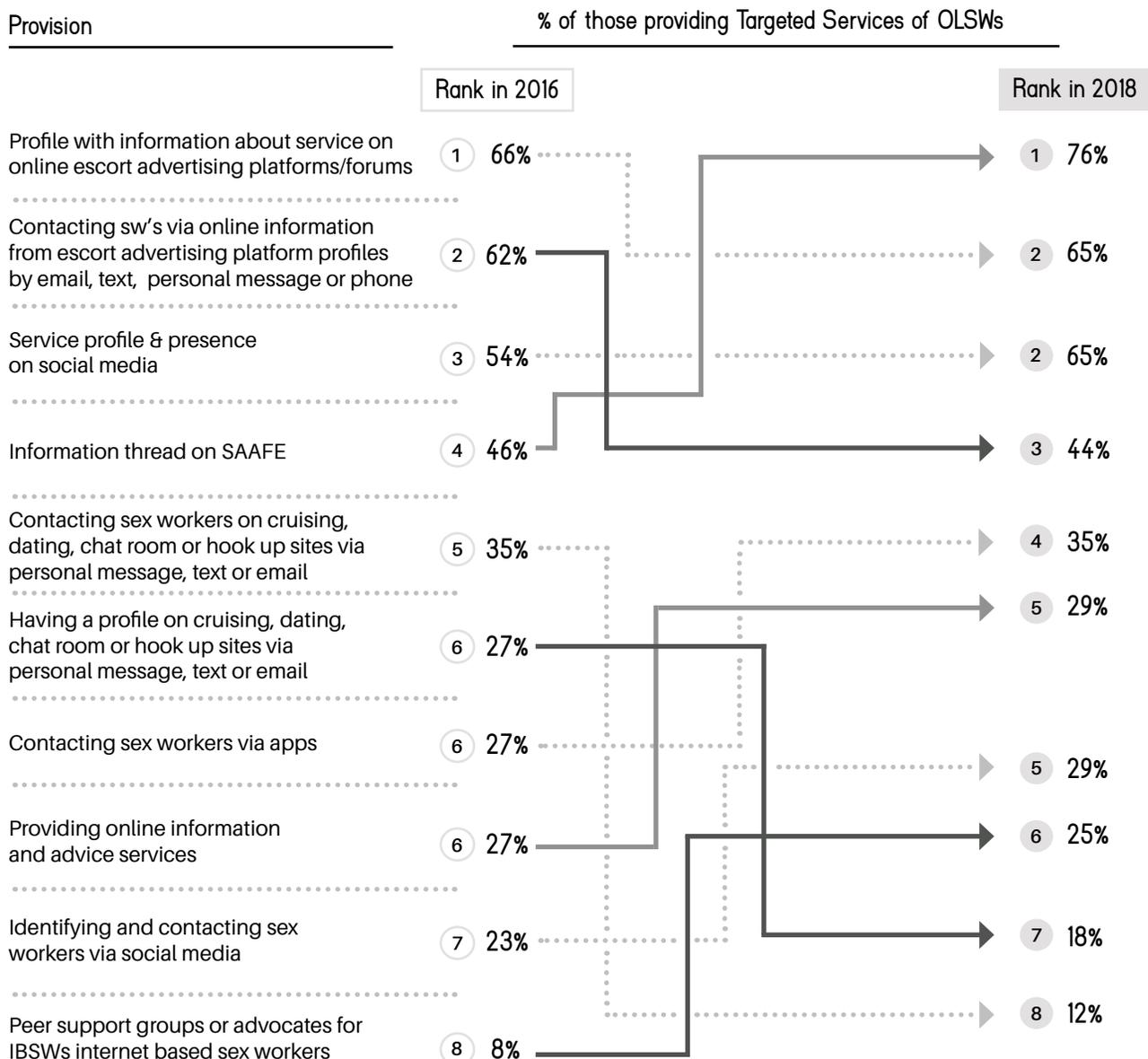
To promote services to OLSWs, it is helpful that your organisation has a clear and coherent digital marketing strategy which takes into consideration OLSWs. INDOORS (2014b) looked at how ICT was being used by nine partner agencies working with sex workers in different European countries, looking at their use across three areas: general communication, outreach and empowerment. All the project participants in the INDOORS (2014b) initiative had to have a marketing plan as part of their netreach strategy in recognition that reaching the target group of sex workers could be challenging and: *'...a marketing plan is essential part of the outreach strategy. A good marketing plan utilises channels that are already known to succeed while finding new ways to garner the target group's attention'* (pg. 37)

*N.B. Projects who had good contact with people working in the online sector noted how important 'word of mouth' recommendations were from other sex workers. This was made either in person or via online networks, passing on contacts about the project, and vouching for services. Hence, marketing strategies need to value and make best use of sex worker networks, the knowledge amongst sex workers within services and community involvement approaches.*



### 4.3 Targeted online methods for online sex workers

BtG carried out two surveys of projects who provided some form of frontline support to sex workers in the UK, the first in early 2016 (Campbell 2016) and the second in May 2018 (Gunbjørnsen 2018). The targeted methods they used to contact OLSWs are summarised below.



As discussed, greater awareness of laws on unsolicited electronic communication and the introduction of the GDPR has meant that organisations have had to review how they contact people and what data they record, making changes where required to ensure they are not in breach of the law. This may have been the reason why, in the 2018 survey, a smaller proportion of projects taking part were contacting people via online advertising platforms or dating, hook up cruising sites, by email, text, private message or phone. Although 44% of those with targeted provisions were still doing so.

There are still numerous ways projects can use ICT to raise their profile and make OLSWs aware of the services they offer which are in line with data protection legislation. We will now look further at some of the methods used by projects working with OLSWs.



## Websites, branding and ethos

Website, social media and other content needs to acknowledge the online sector. Websites are a gateway to your service and projects working with OLSWs. Existing guidance advises that before undertaking any promotional activity, it is a good idea to develop a website for your own service. Whilst the majority of projects in the BtG Practitioner Group had websites, some were part of a much bigger statutory or third sector organisation that had a website containing limited information about their project, making it difficult to direct people interested in their service to website information.

The Homepage is a particularly important entry point for people seeking information about your service - it is often the first place people will be taken to learn about your project. INDOORS (2014b) notes homepages are more effective if maintained so they have current content with short, relevant and interesting items for sex workers. It is important that the website has content which speaks to the needs and experiences of OLSWs. This includes, for example:

- Content which recognises the online sector and diversity of sex work roles within.
- Clear messaging that the project provides services to sex workers in the online sector.
- Has information specifically for OLSWs which speak to issues and areas of information and service provisions that are relevant to the sector.
- Having specific pages on your website for OLSWs, so information that is not relevant for them i.e. for street outreach provision does not have to be browsed. A link directly to bespoke pages/ information can be given on forums, social media and in all digital marketing.

Projects that have a track record of working with the online sector note the importance of having a website and social media accounts that sex workers can go to learn about the organisation. The website address (URL) can be displayed on other platforms used (e.g. social media, sex work forums) and communicated to people engaged in face to face outreach and community development work., to let people know about your service.

People in the online sector use google searches to find information, advice and support. They may check services out having seen other promotion material on social media or having heard about the project on a sex work forum or private group. This allows sex workers to gain more in-depth information about the project, what services you can provide, what your aims are, what your ethos is including your position on sex work and importantly enables people to assess whether your service is credible.



### ***Practice Point***

Services should also ensure the 'how to contact us info' on your websites includes all options for contact including - SMS text messages, WhatsApp or any other messaging service you use, for those who prefer these options to email or telephone contact.



### ***A note on ethos and branding***

It is important for organisations to reflect on what needs to be provided to the sector, and if their aims, ethos and service provision allows them to do so.

If an organisation thinks it is appropriate to deliver services, it is useful to review your website, brand and social media presence as these are likely to be the first things OLSWs will see. It is important to think about what the mission, aims and brand of your organisation communicate to people working in online work.

Consider for example:

- What messages does your homepage and other pages of your website and social media presence communicate in images and text content?
- Does it speak to certain cohorts of sex workers and not others? If it does and they are your target group that may not be an issue but if you are providing services for a wider range of people you will need to review the content of the website.
- Could it be perceived as judging, patronising or offending to some people in sex work?

- Some sex workers in BtG study noted they did not use particular local services in their area because they understood the project focus to be working with sex workers experiencing particular issues which they themselves did not experience, for example, supporting people with drug and alcohol problems or homeless people. This particular focus was communicated partly in the information contained about the projects online.
- Some male sex workers described how the services in their area were for women only and this was reflected in their online content with little reference to male sex work.

Some sex workers who contributed to BtG saw 'exiting' support services as not being something they wanted to engage with. The Global Network of Sex Work Projects looked at ICT and sex work from a global perspective, noting that

*'sex workers are frequently subject to online harassment, including from organisations and individuals who want them to quit sex work'. (2016 pg. 17)*

Some sex workers who took part in BtG stressed that support around moving on or transitioning into other work or roles should be offered in a sensitive manner, available for those who wanted it.

Some sex workers who took part in interviews described being sensitive to, and put off certain services, by certain language/terminology, branding and content used by some projects online. For this reason, it is advisable for projects committed to needs based health and support service provision for the online sector to consider their branding, language and online content. Marketing in different ways or having additional branding to work with OLSWs within a wider organisation is one way to address this. Organisations also need to be transparent about the wider organisation they are part of, including the aims and ethos of that organisation, so that sex workers are aware of this bigger picture and can make a more informed choice in decisions to access services for information and support.

The majority of sex workers in BtG study who were predominantly independent OLSWs supported the existence of sex work projects for those who needed them, particularly 'vulnerable sex workers' and for all in terms of health or safety crises, or if other needs emerged. Some people did regularly use a local project and they provided and valued its specialism, confidentiality, understanding of the online sector and the specific services they accessed. There was general support for appropriate non-invasive marketing to let sex workers know projects are there if needed.



## Blogging

- Blogs are internet-based discussions or information sites, made up of different 'posts'. Some projects have a blog feature on their website and promote new blog posts through social media platforms they are active on. These can be a good way of updating on project developments or getting information out on health or rights issues relevant to OLSWs. A wide range of topics can be covered, and a range of people, from the project itself, sex workers themselves, sex worker led organisations to other partner agencies can get involved in writing these blog posts.
- Blogs can be a space where sex workers talk about issues and express views anonymously or otherwise. BtG (Sanders *et. al.* 2017) highlighted active blogging by some sex workers in the UK. Blogs can be interactive and can be set up to enable visitors to leave comments which can encourage participation but does require additional content management and moderation.
- Some projects have also found it to useful to be guest bloggers on blogs hosted by others that are popular with sex workers, this again can spread the word about a service and enhance online presence.



Basis Sex Work Project have a blog on the 'Whores of Yore' web platform which grew out of the 'Whores of Yore' Twitter profile set up by Dr Kate Lister, which has 170,000 followers and has a strong sex work following.



## Vlogging

Some projects create simple short vlogs using staff or volunteer smart phone or computer technology which can then be uploaded to websites or blogs, with links shared by organisational social media accounts. Others produce short original videos, often as part of a specific initiative when additional funding has been secured for production. YouTube provides a free platform for projects to upload and share videos.

**Basis Sex Work Project** produced a bespoke infographic e-flyer to specifically promote the services it offers to OLSWs who identify as women - the icons developed represented areas of service provision they had found to be popular with workers in the online sector in their area. It was produced inhouse using an infographic design package. This was produced by project workers and volunteers who were part of a netreach team, amongst this team were current and former escorts and webcammers.



## Promotional resources

Some projects have promotional resources with content specifically designed for the online sector. This means people in the sector can clearly see that a project is available for them, recognises their sector and speaks to needs they may have. Resources designed which can be easily shared on social media and other platforms were seen as particularly useful for online netreach promotion.

Producing such resources provides an ideal opportunity for projects to adopt participatory and peer led processes to create content.



In the wider European context the Indoors project produced some resources specifically for indoor sex workers. for example 'Safer Work' which includes key tips on safety, health and rights: [www.lampep.eu](http://www.lampep.eu)

## Project profile on advertising and hook up platforms



Some adult services advertising platforms will permit health and support projects to have an organisational profile or space where information about services can be provided. Some will have a forum area where conversations take place and the project can respond to discussion threads.

Some projects working with LGBTQ and CIS male sex workers who took part in BtG had profiles on hook up, dating and cruising platforms, where sex workers advertise overtly or covertly, often shaped by the policies of the platform. In these contexts, projects need to be clear that the profile represents an organisation and the netreach workers behind the profile are there in support project capacity. This was often carried out by LGBTQ projects as part of their wider sexual health promotion. The information that can be given on a profile varies across platforms, with some permitting more detailed information. Some platforms welcome netreach presence but others do not.

MESMAC Yorkshire have profiles on a range of dating and hook up apps for men who have sex with men, including platforms for a range of sexual cultures such as fetish, kink and chem sex scenes. Sex workers are just one cohort of people present in and using such spaces. Community development workers will engage in online conversations with people on those platforms when contacted and provide brief information about the organisation's services especially free condoms and lube. A Digital Engagement Worker supports wider digital engagement strategy for the organisation. They have a presence on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube and via these can disseminate information about the service and communicate health promotion messages.



### **Practice Point**

Ensure you provide clear concise information about the services you offer, links to your website/social media and how to access, providing various options for contacts.

Deciding where to place such profiles should be informed by prior assessment through mapping, needs assessment and consultation to establish:

- Which forums and platforms sex workers in your area use.
- Which platforms allow project membership/accounts/profiles. To find this out: read platform registration information, terms and conditions and contact the administrator of the platform. Some are very supportive of project inclusion so information about health and other services is available to people who use their platform.

Projects with such profiles work within each sites' code of conduct. Projects have tended to just have a profile with no proactive messaging, otherwise known as a passive approach, which has on many sites reduced the chances of being blocked and being in line with PECR. Also, some platforms will block profiles of people selling sex if they are identified and hence, there is sensitivity around project profiles and the messages within them.

Some platforms that are keen to support public health initiatives and wider support services, offer appropriate ways that projects can have information about services they offer on their platforms. Some may permit projects to have membership or participate in certain elements of their platform or have social media accounts and retweet information about projects. Others signpost sex workers to links for support services when they register with the platform.

It is advisable to get in touch with administrators and webmasters of platforms to let them know about your project and explore if there are any mutually acceptable ways of the project having an appropriate presence on the platform. If the platform has regional or national reach coordinated approaches from a consortium of projects or a national body to which projects are linked (for example

National Ugly Mugs) can be a more effective way forward. National Ugly Mugs are a partner in BtG and through existing links that NUM had with a national platform, we were able to facilitate their engagement in BtG and agree that projects could have banners on the platform visible to adult service providers.

Similarly, several LGBTQ projects in Scotland described how they worked in partnership to establish an overarching policy for netreach that was produced by liaising with representatives from a popular gay dating platform to discuss appropriate use of the platform by health promotion services. A specific chat room for Scottish netreach projects was created and protocols agreed regarding project presence in other chat rooms and this included considerations regarding contacting male escorts.

In Ireland, a community support project worker from Gender Orientation Sexual Health HIV, GOSHH, Limerick, Ireland [www.goshh.ie](http://www.goshh.ie) described how they reach out to OLSWs and how they attempt to communicate, share information and offer support in a sensitive way. The key tool they used was their account with an advertising platform which has a related forum for members:

*'We have a "special user" account on an advertising platform. I log on as often as I can and read through the forum. If there are sexual health discussions I answer them. If there are discussions that are relevant to law, support or general health and well-being in the private forum sections for escorts only, I answer them. Sometimes, I post a thread to start a discussion about something relevant in my geographical area. Whenever I have a question about direction to take, or materials to develop, I post a thread. I also advertise special events we have coming up. Occasionally I write a blog. People PM me, I PM people more rarely...I don't like to be too active because it is not my space'.*



## Web banners and other marketing

Some online advertising and dating/hook up platforms will place 'banners' or project information on areas of their platforms open to adult service providers for free, others will not.

As the range of platforms who will permit project membership and profiles for free is limited and may not include the platforms where the people you want to reach are, some projects may consider investing in paid for banners or other options available as 'marketing for a fee'. These can be on specific escort sites, social networking or hook up platforms. Deciding on which platforms to use is best informed by knowledge about which platforms people in the area you serve utilise. Having local sex workers involved is again beneficial here. One project described having a

paid for call out on a popular social networking and hook up app for LGBTQ people, as part of their wider health promotion strategy, and they received a reduced rate from the app for this.

Some projects who are offering services to agency escorts and safety have service information on agency web platforms.



## Chat rooms

Chat rooms are virtual online spaces where multiple people can log on and chat, usually via text but some have the option for webcam chat. Whereas instant messaging is more for one to one discussions, chat rooms connect multi people who usually come together around a shared interest or group.

Amongst projects involved in BtG, those working with LGBTQ communities and male sex workers shared valuable experience of netreach in chat rooms. There is a considerable history of sexual health promotion and wider community development work by such projects in chat rooms. There are some specialised gay chatrooms, with interests such as domination, bondage and leather. It is because sex workers may be present in some of these spaces that some projects include them in their promotion work with sex workers. Projects who carry out netreach in platforms do so within agreed protocols.

UKNSWP (2008a) guidance on outreach touched on netreach and they advised that when establishing contact with sex workers in chat rooms, project workers should be aware that sex workers might be in the chat room because they are looking for work and/or private casual non-paying sexual contacts. Therefore, interventions may need to be brief and precise.

Again, the advantage of having a project website or social media profile allows you to quickly send the URL, so the sex worker can get details later. UKNSWP stressed the importance of ensuring that the screen names of netreach workers should also be obvious and indicate organisational affiliation. They flagged that as there is no way to validate information given online this means. *'Just as you may be a customer pretending to be a netreach worker, so might the sex worker be a client (or someone else) pretending to be a sex worker'* t. This means outreach staff need to be very cautious when undertaking this type of netreach and work within agreed organisational protocols for chat and messaging during netreach.

If you are developing chat room netreach, it may be helpful to contact other projects who have experience of doing this.

## Sex worker forums



Some forums set up by sex workers for peer support do permit projects to have membership and to have access to and participate in certain areas of the forum. Projects can post and maintain a thread about their project and sex worker members looking for information, advice and support about health and other services can access this. People wanting to contact the project can either post publicly or send a private message.

Two of the better known forums are the Support and Advice for Escorts (SAAFE) Forum and the Good Escort Forum and both permit sex work project members:



SAAFE has a specific forum area for 'Sex Work Project' visible in the General Category section of the Home Page: [www.saafe.info/main/index.php](http://www.saafe.info/main/index.php)

Good Escort Forum, which is 'a free escort and masseur only advice and support forum for male sex workers serving the male to male market' has an 'organisations and community projects' section: [www.goodescort.co.uk/forum/22-organisations-and-community-projects](http://www.goodescort.co.uk/forum/22-organisations-and-community-projects)



## Practice Point

Tips from projects who are active on such forums are:

- Keep the profile about your service up to date and post new information about service developments.
- Post information relevant for OLSWs.
- Be regular and consistent with your contact to promote the service.
- Where appropriate be active in other threads and discussions, where you can share knowledge and information you have, this not only is part of your role as a project worker but contributes to an active presence for the project.
- If it is a forum for a specific group of sex workers e.g. escorts, only be on there if you can provide a service relevant to them and you bring something in your professional expertise or can be a gateway to resources useful to that group.

Such forums (both of which are websites) are rich resources in their own right, to which projects can signpost sex workers if they are not already aware of them.

Some industry linked forums which have both sex worker and customer members also permit project membership. Some projects have found it helpful to promote their services in such spaces. Especially for projects in areas where there is a large membership from their region. If there is more than one project in an area offering services to the online sector it may be useful to consider joint or a coordinated approach.

 **Practice Point**

Ethical practice should be an essential element of project presence in sex work forums, therefore, projects should:

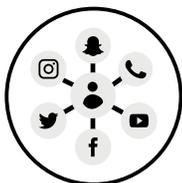
- Be transparent about who you are, covert profiles should not be posted.
- Remain aware and sensitive to the fact that you are in a sex worker space and that your presence is not intrusive.
- In general, projects need to ensure that they use respectful, non-patronising, non-judgemental language on websites, social media and any online space. Do not assume all those working in the online sector want or need support. There is a further need to balance and recognise a range of information and support needs some in the sector have, reflecting a spectrum of people working in the sector, some of whom may face various challenges and ‘vulnerabilities’ around which they choose to seek support, others who may not.

As noted in the introduction, there are now a plethora of sex worker groups used for peer support set up by sex workers using messaging apps which enable private groups, for example Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter. These range from small collegiate or friendship groups to larger, regional and national groups who may have several administrators. Some projects have links with sex worker members of such groups who will provide updated information about the project to the group, showing again the importance of peer support and networks. One project who had an established track record of providing confidential services to indoor and OLSWs was invited to be a member of one group formed by sex workers in the particular city where the project delivered services and was able to post updates or respond to any queries in the group or via personal messaging.



**Other forums and online information spaces**

Speak to your sex work community and think creatively about other online spaces where sex workers you offer services to be may browse information. This includes non sex work specific forums for example university information sharing services such as Blackboard, LGBTQ forums, online spaces which migrants may access for example the websites of community support groups.



**Social media**

BtG found that social media platforms are important to many sex workers for:

- Marketing and communicating with customers.
- Sharing work related photos and content.
- Business networking
- Peer support
- Accessing information about health, advice and other support services.
- Advocacy and campaigning.
- Leisure time use.

Sex workers like all others, participate in social media and use such platforms to access information. Preferences that sex workers have in relation to social media platforms vary, with some people choosing to be very active for work purposes on particular sites and some people not at all. Others use social media in their leisure time but not for work and vice versa. Whilst there are different preferences and levels of use of social media platforms by OLSWs, sex workers are present in most social media spaces, especially the well-known established platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat.

Social media platforms provide online spaces where projects can use non direct marketing messages to promote their services, reaching out to OLSWs and provide information about services. INDOORS (2014b) found social media to have vast potential for networking, communication, PR and advocacy.

As INDOORS (2014b) advised, the use of social media and other online channels for communication requires planning. Organisations are responsible for their staff/volunteers and ensuring appropriate and professional engagement within those spaces. It is important to have a strategy and work plan for social media activity, that is mindful of all social media content being conducted on behalf of the organisation is public and representative.



### Practice Point

Those projects who had an established and active online presence and had experience of appealing to sex workers stressed the importance of social media messaging for promoting their services to OLSWs and communicating key messages.

Projects involved in BtG who were active on Twitter and Facebook to promote their services referred to various advantages of using these and gave various tips in relation to their use:

- They're commonly used by sex workers.
- They're free, cost effective and can have large reach.
- Gives sex workers the option of browsing and only following or liking if they wish to do so.
- Provides information about the project in the 'Twitter sphere' and enables sex workers to access info about the project, particularly if they would rather not follow or 'like'.
- Provides a quick and easy way of communicating messages, sharing information and providing updates about the project.
- The private messaging function/s provides another route through which sex workers can get in touch with you - it puts sex workers in control.
- On Twitter, you can follow the work accounts of sex workers in your area, so they know you're there if they need you - popular with OLSWs.
- Great if champions and advocates within the sex work community can like and retweet project tweets - nothing beats peer promotion.
- On Twitter and FB, follow the accounts/pages of sex worker led projects, activists and organisations in the UK and globally. Join any relevant groups they may have.
- Think about the issues and content that would be of interest to the diversity of people in the online sector.
- Messages communicated across social media should be short and easy to read.
- Projects can widen options for contact and communication but need to ensure there is capacity to respond to these in a timely manner. It is helpful if automatic alerts are set for periods when such channels are not staffed indicating when messages will be dealt with and pointing to other channels for more immediate response.

Very few projects in BtG referred to using Instagram, Snapchat or other platforms. However, one project who worked with LGBTQ sex workers was exploring how they might use Snapchat for netreach. They were aware sex workers in their area were using this platform in negotiations about bookings and to vet potential customers. People the project worked with were swapping snap chat handles on Facebook enabling them to share photos and 'stories' (series of photos). When handles were shared users could have a very brief cam exchange. You can ask a person to Snapchat what they look like, which some sex worker felt worked well as a verification tool. Whilst videos can be sent, it is harder to record them and there are limits on how often they can be played in a day. They worked with the LGBTQ student society around webcams, raising awareness about various issues e.g. the potential for filming without their consent.

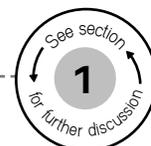


### Practice Point

When using any social media platform, you should ensure that you work within your organisation's social media policy, code of conduct and netreach protocols!

The OLSW terrain is constantly changing, sex workers have been early adopters of new technologies and hence as new platforms emerge it is important to be aware of how they are used by sex workers. Also changes in the legal regulation of sex work can impact on sex workers, for example, if a platform changes its terms and conditions and no longer permits adult service related content or accounts.

Such changes, at the time of writing are playing out in the US with the introduction of SESTA and FOSTA legislation with a range of detrimental impacts for OLSWs. See Section 1 for more info.



In the wake of SESTA/FESTA and the shadow banning of sex workers accounts. Switter, ([www.switter.at](http://www.switter.at)) described as a 'sex-work friendly social space' was established (outside of US jurisdiction), gaining a membership of 56,000 within a month.

It was set up for anyone involved in the sex work community and aims to provide an 'open and free community where sex workers chat to fans, release new shoots, announce tour dates and whatever else they would like to share'.



## Practice Point

With a dynamic online environment, it is beneficial for projects to keep abreast of changes and have knowledge about new tech developments, as well as good level of digital interest, literacy and skills within the team. Skilled staff should be encouraged to support less experienced team members who may want to enhance their professional development in this area. As noted earlier, reviewing the platforms used by sex workers periodically, evaluating netreach interventions and including sex workers should aid with identifying and implementing such changes.



### Email

Some projects noted how offering email as a means for people to make contact with their project or seek advice is still important. Some noted that they provide email based online advice support and information and found some people preferred this form of communication, particularly the anonymity it provided in comparison to a phone or face to face meet up.

Some projects had an agreed introductory email to incorporate into email responses to people who contacted the project via email, with inquiries about the project and the services it offers.

.....

Most project workers who took part in the BtG Practitioners Group communicated with sex workers who accessed their service via mobile phone short messaging service (SMS) and had for some years, finding this a popular way of sending quick messages in a relatively non-intrusive way. This was used for a wide range of functions including ongoing communication, checking people were safe and well, and confirming appointments. Some who delivered STI screening or worked closely with other services who did, used Text/SMS for test results.

### SMS, Messaging Apps and Instant messaging



Some projects had standard introductory SMS messages that could be utilised or adapted for more general initial inquiries about the project. For example, one of POW Nottingham's 'Text Reach' message:

*"Hi, we are POW Nottingham - [www.pow-advice.org.uk](http://www.pow-advice.org.uk). We are an organisation that offers free and confidential services and support. POW provides free condoms and lube; safety alarms; tampon sponges; how to keep safe on line and sexual health screenings. Our dedicated outreach workers, X and Y, provide a drop off service four times a week or alternatively pop into POW's drop in centre run by W and Z. If you would like a drop off from POW add us on WhatsApp 07563828893, call us on 0115 924 9992 or drop in at the centre"*

Instant messaging was described by INDOORS (2014b, Pg. 13) as 'a type of online chat that offers real time text transmission over the internet between two parties'. To access most of these, you install specific software or access it through a browser. Skype for example has an instant messenger feature.

There is scope for projects to use instant messaging to provide information and support. Again, as with all forms on online and tech enabled info and support this should be conducted within organisational policies and codes of conduct.

There are a wide range of free messaging apps for smart phones that have emerged, several projects identified themselves as using instant messaging apps (WhatsApp was most commonly mentioned) as a way of contacting and communicating with sex workers, with the following comments illustrating this;

*'WhatsApp has been a wonderful way of keeping in touch with mobile sex workers who have to move around the country'*

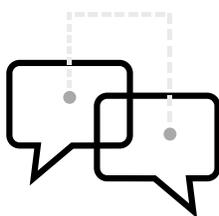
*'Technology is key for free communication and safety, we have found WhatsApp extremely helpful'*

For those projects who used WhatsApp, it was understood to be popular with sex workers in all sectors, as it is a free service (enabling calling, text, photo and video share) and it was felt there was considerable trust in its security amongst the sex work community. WhatsApp has end to end encryption, which means only the sender and receiver can read messages. Remember: There are of course other messaging apps such as Viber, Google Allo, Signal etc.

## Case study:

Whilst not in the UK context, the experience of the Bar Hostess Empowerment & Support Programme (BHESP), provides an example of how WhatsApp can be useful for projects alongside other online platforms/applications. BHESP is also an illustration of a project which adopts an empowerment approach with a high level of sex worker leadership and inclusion. BHESP aims to influence policy and facilitate provision of quality health services, human rights awareness, legal services and economic empowerment for sex workers, women using drugs and bar hostesses in Kenya. Although many SWs are not connected to the internet they can still access WhatsApp via prepaid internet bundles, obtained by converting air time or buying from mobile money service Mpesa, a mobile phone-based money transfer and financing service that is popular throughout Kenya.

BHESP has established several WhatsApp groups, adding members as the group develops with co-administrators from the sex work community. These are used for a wide range of functions: to pursue common agendas, promote their sex worker movement, give new information, share support and opportunities. They are used to share information and photos of dangerous individuals, communicate key messages about ending violence against sex workers or provide information on HIV prevention or new health technologies like PrEP. BHESP created a WhatsApp emergency Response team, when a sex worker is in trouble and cannot make a call, or does not have enough credit to text, but have data bundles they can send a message to the team who will be alerted and respond swiftly without the knowledge of the perpetrator. Sex worker members of BHESP have created a number of What's App peer support groups for example for sex workers who are living with HIV and one for those who are HIV negative and use PrEP. BHESP is active on Facebook and Twitter and uses these platforms to communicating key messages to sex workers and the wider public, raise awareness and campaigning about various issues. BHESP uses YouTube to post video to challenge stigma, sharing videos which address myths and misconception about sex work.



### Live chat support

Increasingly retailers, health and third sector charitable organisations have a 'live chat' option integrated into their websites/platforms. The advantage of this is that it can be a means of widening options for accessing information and support about a project, complimenting phone or face to face interactions.

Live chat may be particularly attractive to people who are comfortable with online communication and for sex workers who may prefer a degree of anonymity it can give, providing a means of contact and access for those people who are reluctant to call a project or make a face to face appointment.

Several chat tools are available with a range of packages and some of the market leading providers have reached out to the health and third sectors. For example:

**Correlation: European Harm Reduction Network** specifically designed the Social Intervention Tool (SIT) as a not for profit, easily accessible and affordable high quality internet based intervention which could be used by organisations with limited resources for internet outreach. Users can develop their own website and chat tool. The **Social Intervention Tool** was developed by an expert group from the network which had experience of working with marginalised or vulnerable people including sex workers, men who have sex with men, drug users and young people at risk.

There is a fee for using the tool. SIT has a number of features including: canned answers for operators (these are pre-written answers for netreach workers to use for questions that people frequently ask or related to key areas of information and advice the service provides), file sharing during conversation, different audio and text notifications, logs with powerful search, notes and tags for conversations, an option to save or not to save logs and busy modes for operators.

Correlation recommend that before an organisation starts using the SIT chat tool they should first:

- 
- On Twitter follow the accounts of sex worker projects, activists and organisations in the UK and globally, like them and follow on FB and join any relevant groups they may have.
  - Think about the issues and content that would be of interest to the diversity of people in the online sector.
  - Messages communicated across social media should be short and easy to read.



These would apply to any live chat tool. For more information about the tool and to register go to: [www.sittool.eu/index.html](http://www.sittool.eu/index.html)

Only a minority of projects involved in BtG had a live chat provision. Here are two examples:

**The Matrix Project, Norfolk**<sup>7</sup> introduced a live chat feature to their provisions. As an NHS project and as part of website redesign a tool was designed specifically for them and incorporated into their website. The online chat sessions were advertised on the project website, Twitter and by word of mouth for three two hour sessions per week in the evening. The tool was designed as a public group chat on the website. A member of Matrix team would launch an event at each session and let people know they were live and available to answer questions. At any time, the user or the advisor could switch to private chat. Sessions were themed to share information about health issues, rights or services offered. Clear ground rules for contributors were displayed on the website. The chat advisor moderated all comments and questions before they were published and could bar people very easily with a ban icon. The project faced challenges in ensuring staff/volunteers were always available to deliver the provision and the level of use.

**Basis Sex Work Project, Basis Yorkshire, Leeds** piloted a live chat tool information option as part of its involvement in BtG. It used an established live chat software provider which organisations can use for a fee. This was selected as it could be customised, and pre-written responses could be created, the system was fully compliant with UK data protection legislation including GDPR, servers were UK located, it had UK based customer support and was used by some organisations in the public sector and charities. When the application is live sex workers can, via a link on the Basis Sex Work Project website, access the chat tool and request info or support in real time, this is private chat. Basis netreach workers are alerted by the tool and respond to the chat request.

Staffing and volunteer levels only enabled this to be live and staffed one afternoon per week. Alongside staffing the tool, other activities were carried out including updating info on a sex worker forum, messaging on social media and promoting the live chat service. When not live the project can be messaged via the tool. Pre-prepared responses were created in readiness for commonly asked questions i.e. How can I get free STI testing? Can you come out to see me? Over an eighteen-month period there were only a small number of workers who got in touch via the live chat tool.

The small number of projects involved in BtG Practitioners group who offered live chat tended to operate chat in pairs. INDOORS (2014b) advised two workers should be online together at the same time, which enables staff to confer on information and advice given and as a safeguard for people accessing the service.

Projects in the BtG study varied as to whether they adopted this approach for a netreach session that involved updating project information on forums and updating project profiles rather than live interaction. As with other outreach sessions, netreach sessions which involve a team should include a short meeting before for preparation and debriefing after the session. Whether activities are conducted individually or in pairs there should be an option for on call supervision input.

<sup>7</sup> **Matrix** were active members of BtG Practitioners Group until it's closure at the end of March 2018 ([www.matrixproject.org](http://www.matrixproject.org))

Experts who have been involved in developing SIT via the Correlation network met with BtG during the project and shared their learning. The SIT was one of the ICT tools that the INDOORS project utilised, all partners were trained in its use, many included it in their netreach strategies, and evaluated it. Most projects in the INDOORS initiative could only offer the provision for one or two sessions per week, the majority could offer several chat languages.

Here are some learning points from these endeavours; followed by a case study from experts from Correlation, and further learning from INDOORS project (2014b).

Live chat learning points:

- It is hard for live chat and other forms of online information and advice to become established. To take off they need to be embedded into project and staff job descriptions, training and practices, rather feature as an add on.
- All projects in the INDOORS initiative found reaching the target group to be the biggest challenge and reported a low take up of the service.
- Correlation network advised that from their experience, if delivering only in one city or area with a limited target population size, the section of people likely to access is small. For Basis and Matrix, the SW population living or working in their areas was only of a certain size and live chat is not everyone's preferred mode of contact.
- There is some evidence that live chat has been more successful when offered to larger populations and when they are open and staffed at a wider range of times, as a phone line would be - people do not tend to wait for a slot for an inquiry.
- Correlation have observed cases of live chat working well. This has been when projects form collaboratives, have joint protocols and share the staffing of the live chat so it can be available on a wider number of days and times. Often these projects are in different towns or regions of a country or are operated by an organisation with a national remit. Cooperation across regions and services has the advantages of pooling expertise and staff resources.
- Live chat has a lower threshold than phone chat (it does not require voice contact), and many young people are used to live chat and this is an indicator that in the future more people may be more comfortable with it.

## Case study:

Correlation shared the example of Rotterdam Public Health working with SOA AIDs Foundation in the Netherlands. Together they offer live chat to three populations - including SWs for whom they address a range of issues including sexual health. Nurses from public health work with SOA Aids staff to deliver the service. Staff from both services receive the same training, the first part- focused on how to use the chat tool and then the second part based around role play and discussion. Some staff found it challenging initially if they weren't used to online chat, but with training and experience they adapted and felt it provided a vehicle to get closer to some people's needs, particularly those who preferred online to face to face support. They found training needed to include staff at all levels, so managers understand the importance of building it into recruitment and service design. The chat service for sex workers is promoted in a range of ways, online and via outreach work and community development work where outreach staff go to sex work venues and give out information about the live chat facility. Initially, it offered only a couple of hours per week but expanded, initially offering the chat sessions in the evening but found that people feel better able to chat during the day as they had more social contacts in the evening and hence that was their leisure time.

A shared multi partner approach can tap into a range of specialist areas for example e-health, legal rights, tax, benefits and 'canned answers' can be developed and shared across the partnership. INDOORS (2014b) suggested ways to increase take up of live chat and similar ICT interfaces including;

- Increase sex workers' involvement.
- Have it available more often and for wider time slots, set hours for more accessible for social media.
- Promote the service while sessions are taking place and use social media for more general communication.
- Review marketing use flyers in community settings, banners on different websites, encourage other services to promote.
- Cooperate with other organisations and platforms or other netreach programs.

## 4.4 Multiple methods

Sex workers in the BtG survey, engaged in varying ways with online advertising platforms, sex worker forums and social media, they had different preferences. This and the experience of projects working with people in OLSW highlight that it is advantageous to use a variety of methods to get information about your project to sex workers and to offer a variety of channels through which sex workers can communicate with the project.

This was flagged by INDOORS (2014b), but they also cautioned that there needs to be a level of resourcing to ensure that the approach used is viable;

*'Technology and its applications change rapidly; service providers must therefore always evaluate which ICT tools to use and how in order to reach the target group. Different tools are needed for reaching different populations – there is no one tool for reaching all target groups. Ideally it would be best to use a variety of tools, but this depends on an organisations resources' (pg. 46)*

### Case study: \_\_\_\_\_

Basis has provided netreach activities via a volunteer team (which has during BtG included current and former OLSWs) and its wider marketing and communications work which is supported by paid staff, who are knowledgeable about sex work and sex work policy and the local context. Basis Yorkshire has a Twitter and Facebook presence, including a dedicated Twitter account for the Sex Work Project, to ensure material posted is relevant to its followers, which include sex workers who sometimes engage directly with the account. The project is very mindful that the project serves sex workers across all sectors in Leeds and as the online and indoor sector is large it has a high proportion of content directly related to those sectors. Individual members of the sex work staff team have work related profiles on Twitter and work within their organisational social media policy to contribute to their online presence. This includes staff with specific responsibility to work with online and indoors sex workers through an outreach and community development approach. Basis website has a dedicated page for OLSWs and has been able to offer a live chat information and advice facility one afternoon a week, limited by staff and volunteer capacity. Basis maintains a presence on the SAAFE forum and regularly updates information about the service. One afternoon per week is utilised for netreach activities, but Basis is active on social media on an ongoing basis. Basis has carried out a number of campaigns which have a strong social media and digital presence, enhanced by the online support of current and former sex workers.



For example it's 17 Days of action campaign which took place in the days running up to 17th December. International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers in 2016 and 2017: [www.basisyorkshire.org.uk/basis-campaign-2017-17-days-end-violence-sex-workers](http://www.basisyorkshire.org.uk/basis-campaign-2017-17-days-end-violence-sex-workers)

Additionally, in the 'Our Voices Project' statements about sex work made by sex workers who use the Basis service and were participating in the initiative, were incorporated into 'tart card' style

images. These appeared in a book and on social media, utilised to challenge stereotypes and stigma. Basis tweets on matters of local and national sex work policy.

## 4.5 Back to data protection and data storage

Some of the activities discussed in this section, such as mapping, netreach etc., may create data you want to store both on paper and electronically. As with all data you have to think about where and how you store the information, for example, do you use encryption, passwords, restricted access, lockable cabinets etc. You need to think about what information you store and why you store it and be able to evidence and justify your decisions.

Often people you are engaging with may have multiple names and aliases, you need to account for this and what they want to be called, being aware that if a sex worker

wants your help to access specific support e.g. relating to welfare benefits, you would require their official name as well.

You may need signed permissions to hold any identifiable personal data depending on which grounds your organisation processes data.<sup>8</sup> (e.g. full name, email, mobile phone number). Every organisation needs to be clear how they handle data for people who use their service, and if appropriate will need to ensure it has a system in place to request consent and evidence that this consent has been obtained.

<sup>8</sup> ICO defines personal data as 'any information relating to an identifiable person who can be directly or indirectly identified in particular by reference to an identifier. This definition provides for a wide range of personal identifiers to constitute personal data, including name, identification number, location data or online identifier, reflecting changes in technology and the way organisations collect information about people'. (ICO 2018a) [www.ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr/key-definitions/what-is-personal-data](http://www.ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr/key-definitions/what-is-personal-data)

All organisations should have their own guidance or policy on how long to keep information. The guidance from the Information Commissioners Office is;

*'Personal data processed for any purpose or purposes shall not be kept for longer than is necessary for that purpose or those purposes' (ICO 2018a)*

There is no prescribed amount of time for general paperwork, unless it relates to Safeguarding (consult your organisational policy).

For people for whom you do not have signed permissions to store personal details (this includes people whose details you got from advertising platforms) the GDPR states that you should not retain any potentially identifying details. This means you must not store full names, initials, email addresses, working names, twitter handles, mobile numbers etc.

You can however record the first part of the postcode, gender, town/city etc. This means it is possible to store and process this information for mapping purposes etc. Mapping and using online sites to learn about your local scene is permissible, as long as you ensure that the way you record findings does not include personal identifiable details e.g., full postcodes, phone numbers etc.

**N.B :** As laws and regulations change we recommend all organisations check current regulations relating to data protection and information governance when embarking on netreach and periodically after having established provisions and incorporate any changes into policies and practice.



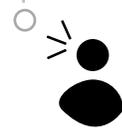
Further guidance: The website for the Information Commissioners Office is a critical source of info: [www.ico.org.uk](http://www.ico.org.uk) - it offers an advice phone line aimed at small businesses or charities on 0303 123 1113.

## 4.6 Going online but not leaving behind face to face support and community development

This guidance focuses on netreach but projects involved in BtG who were working most effectively with people in the online sector did not just rely on contacting people and delivering information and support through ICT tools, they also used more traditional service delivery methods, for example, in person face to face outreach and one to one support, or provisions such as community-based health clinics and drop-in spaces where people could access support.

### Practice Point

Having dedicated workers and or dedicated project initiatives for indoor and online workers can contribute to ensuring a focus on accessible and appropriate services for people in this sector is maintained. It means there is staff or volunteer capacity to dedicate time to building relationships with and delivering initiatives and services for OLSWs.



As noted in Section One INDOORS (2014) has a clear warning 'Remember online interventions do not replace traditional services, they provide a complement' (pg. 75).



INDOORS (2014b) also noted, that providing information through the internet whilst effective does not alone address the diversity of needs amongst sex workers generally and the online sector and...



*'particularly those who are most vulnerable and marginalised. Some migrant sex workers for example may not have access to the internet for months. Victims of trafficking or other forms of coercion might not find a tool such as the SIT easily and would rarely meet outreach workers... The ideal scenario combines various technologies with in-person services and outreach aimed at different groups of sex workers according to their needs'. (pg. 59)*

# 5. Specific provisions: meeting diverse needs of the sector

In this section we look at learning from BtG about what OLSWs identified as useful provisions in the sector and what is currently delivered by projects, which they felt were utilised and valuable for OLSWs. These were identified from data collected in the two BtG online surveys of projects and the knowledge share amongst members of the BtG and NUM Practitioners group.

This is not intended to be guidance about delivering such provisions, although we have used some examples shared as part of BtG. Nor is it intended to be a comprehensive list of areas of information and support people in OLSW may want. As advised in section two needs assessments should always be carried out and reviewed to ensure provisions meet the specific needs of OLSWs served by projects.

A recurrent point made by OLSWs and project workers was that everybody had different preferences in terms of using health and wider support services (including whether to use services or not), and different needs that they were looking to have met by services if they did access. Many OLSWs who took part in BtG noted that there was greater need for support amongst certain groups of 'vulnerable sex workers', most commonly identified were those experiencing problematic substance use, domestic abuse, forms of exploitation such as trafficking, poverty and financial hardship and certain groups of migrant sex workers who may face additional issues and barriers to accessing health and support. Specialist non-judgemental provisions were valued by the majority for their work with such 'vulnerable' groups but also for being there for all at any point needed, particularly during a health, safety or other crisis.

This reinforces points made earlier in this guidance about the importance of practitioners recognising diverse needs, not treating those working in the online sector as a monolithic group, but ensuring those delivering services work in a person-centred way.

## Sexual health services

Most commonly identified by OLSWs as a crucial service was easy access to free, confidential, non-judgemental sexual health services. Projects who worked with OLSWs also found such provisions to be popular amongst people in the sector. Amongst specific provisions identified were:

- **Sexual health screening and treatment (for those who need it):** projects varied in terms of what screening they offered with accessibility either through mainstream sexual health services with specially trained staff or dedicated community-based sex worker clinics or outreach initiatives. Some mainstream services worked in partnership with sex work outreach projects, for example a sexual health nurse working with outreach staff. Some projects had their own nursing or outreach staff offering services such as self-swab screening for certain sexually transmitted infections on outreach or at their drop-ins. Some offered home test kits which could be ordered online. Some projects had fast track arrangements for SWs at local clinics or services they worked in partnership with. Some were able to offer a range of options for people in sex work.
- **Sexual health information and advice** was offered by many as was information on local sexual health and contraceptive services.
- **Safer sex supplies:** access to free condoms, lubricants and dams (dental and finger dams). Some female sex workers also valued access to soft tampons or 'sponges'. Many services offered condom and safer sex supply drops at peoples working premises (flats/saunas/massage parlours) and/or home base or other locations as part of outreach services. Many valued the free supplies, particularly at times that income was more precarious, some who were experiencing less precarity and had a more regular income preferred to buy their own condoms, some using bulk buying at a reduced rate offered by specific projects. Some projects identified the option of a postal condoms service as something that had been accessed by OLSWs who preferred not to meet face to face or who lived some distance from the office/drop-in/clinic or in an area where outreach workers did not operate. In the project survey, an NHS sexual health outreach worker identified such services as effective for OLSWs who would spread the word within SW networks:

*'Leaving our cards in the free condom packs that we deliver or send by post - they then pass our info onto others'*

- Access to hepatitis C vaccinations, Post exposure prophylaxis (PEP) and Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP).
- Safe working certificates to be available was something identified by those in the adult film industry and something provided by some sexual health services.
- Access to contraceptives. Some projects with nurses in the team or part of partnership arrangements could offer free contraception at drop in's or as part of outreach.
- Some services also offered cervical screening and access to gynaecological services.

For projects who took part in project surveys asked to identify what was working well with OLSWs, sexual health was prominent, illustrated by the following quotations;

*'We provide outreach/STI testing to men's saunas where online sex workers arrange to meet their clients and a free postal condoms and lube scheme which people can sign up for online'.* - **Outreach worker from a LGBTQ project**

*'A sexual health worker doing outreach to women's place of work or home'.* - **Support worker third sector sex work project**

Many project workers described how delivering such services discreetly and in confidence was an important part of gaining individual and community trust and building relationships, which was a springboard for wider services if required and for community involvement.

As has been highlighted by other research and guidance, the sexual health needs of sex workers and how sex workers prefer to access sexual health services can vary (Jeal and Salisbury 2007; Europap 2004), this is the case for OLSWs. Whilst some sex workers in BtG wanted to access a mainstream sexual health clinic or other sexual health services, others preferred a specialist sex work outreach project or clinics where they could go for information, advice and screening. Lowe et al (2017) in a needs assessment of the sexual health needs of OLSWs in Birmingham and Dudley found that most preferred specialist services for sex workers and outreach services. The following quotes from sex worker participants in BtG illustrate these differences.

*'So, the X (sex work support project) they have the STI clinic and they also have like the coffee thing. The health service I find useful because, you have the specialist doctors. And that's where I disclosed one of the sexual assaults and they were very supportive. So, I think the health thing is really good. They're really kind of comprehensive with all the health'.* - **Independent escort, CIS Female**

For those who used mainstream sexual health services BtG found that there was a split between those who disclosed their sex work to sexual health workers and those who did not.

*'We've got a X (NHS sexual health service) ...they've been brilliant. I get condoms I get tested... There's nothing I wouldn't ask them... I have no issues'.* - **Independent escort, CIS Female**

*'I do go for a six-monthly check-up, but I don't tell them I do sex work'.* - **Independent escort, CIS Female**

Lowe et al. (2017) found fewer OLSWs accessing sexual health services in Birmingham and Dudley had disclosed their sex work than those who had. In the BtG first project survey several mainstream sexual health services identified that having trained staff had worked well in creating environments which enable sex workers to openly discuss their needs:

*'Sexual health workers are trained so they're informed and comfortable with asking about sex working and ensuring sex workers can talk openly about their needs'.* - **Representative from sexual health service**

# Safety, crime reporting and support for sex worker victims of crime .....

Projects can play an important role in sharing safety information/ advice, offering third party ugly mugs reporting and supporting OLSW victims of crime around their needs, rights and options.

## Safety info

- Specialism around personal safety or specifically safety for OLSWs was identified as useful. Linked to this providing information and advice about privacy and particularly protecting privacy online was an area sex workers felt projects could contribute to and which increasingly was part of support requested. Projects having a role in signposting people to online information safety resources<sup>9</sup> and sex worker forums and groups where peer advice about safety can also be accessed was identified as useful, as was the provision of information about what constitutes particular crimes.

National Ugly Mugs and some other services noted that they regularly received queries from sex workers where their privacy was being jeopardized. For example: their profiles being used without consent, threats to out them as a sex worker and 'doxing' personal details being shared online. They also noted how there has been an increase in behavior OLSWs are experiencing which constitutes harassment (including online harassment) and seeking support from projects; only some were aware that what they were experiencing was a crime.

- Digitally enabled harassment was amongst the most common crimes reported by OLSWs in BtG (Campbell et al. 2018) and this was the case for those providing direct in person services as well as those digitally mediated service providers, such as webcammers.

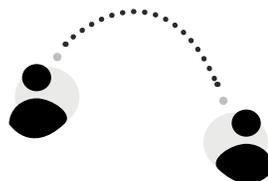
## Ugly mugs reporting and alerts

*'As part of screening I use National Ugly Mugs and the local scheme, so important for safety'*  
**Independent escort and webcammer, transgender woman**

- These enable sex workers to report crimes against them, enabling other sex workers to be alerted to possible offenders and for those who wish, intelligence can be passed to the police anonymously or sex workers can be supported to report. Within the national framework coordinated by NUM there are trusted organizational members to whom reports can be made, who can share safety alerts and promote membership amongst individuals sex workers.

This compliments the NUM scheme option for individual sex workers to join and directly report. NUM has a large online sex worker membership who make reports, receive alerts and can use the other services it provides, as does Ugly Mugs Ireland. In the second project survey an outreach worker in a third sector service providing support to OLSWs pointed to NUM alerts which they distribute locally as popular and working well;

*'The SMS alerts are very popular...and have had a big impact in preventing crime'*



Sex workers also welcomed projects promoting sex work forums and groups through which sex workers could access, safety buddies, warnings about problematic customers and peer safety advice.

<sup>9</sup> BtG has produced safety and privacy information resources for online sex workers, to access these go to; [www.beyond-the-gaze.com/safety-info](http://www.beyond-the-gaze.com/safety-info)

## Support for OLSWs who have been victims/survivors of crime

The majority of sex workers who took part in the BtG study saw an important role for projects in supporting those sex workers who become victims of crime. Specialist projects were seen as providing a confidential space where there was an understanding of sex working and hence less chance of encountering discrimination or judgmental attitudes. As with sexual health specialist services, they were seen also as bridges into other mainstream victim/survivor support services, from which some sex workers may want to access support.

*'If you do have a problem, they could liaise with the police on your behalf. Because the worry you have is... the police, they're meant to have an impartiality - but they will have a personal view on prostitution or domination or sex work in general, and you might get a policeman that's like, "Well I think it's horrible. I'm not going help her." If you have a liaison with a sex work group, they can make sure it's passed further up the chain' - Independent escort, CIS female*

Holistic support both emotional and practical was identified as important by OLSWs; this included support for reporting to the police and accessing justice, for those who chose to pursue that option. Projects were able to offer a useful intermediary role between OLSWs and the police, especially in light of enduring evidence of under-reporting to the police amongst OLSWs due to various factors including; fear of public identification and a lack of trust or confidence in the police (Campbell et al. 2018). Projects can offer reporting routes via special contacts such as sex work liaison officers or other officers who have experience of investigating crimes against sex workers. Also, projects having a wider advocacy role in relation to sex work and policing, seeking accountability in cases where sex workers had encountered problems with the police was seen by OLSWs as a useful role for projects.

## Rape and sexual assault

Access to appropriate specialist support for those sex workers who experience rape, sexual assault or any other sexual violence was identified as important by OLSWs and projects. Several projects had provided such support to OLSWs encompassing crisis support around issues such as sexual, physical and emotional health, safety, reporting and ongoing support. Those projects with specialist sex work Independent Sex Violence Advisors (SWISVAs) could offer specialism and capacity through that role, designed to provide holistic support to sex workers who have experienced rape or sexual assault, from reporting right through to court appearances.

SWISVA's who took part in BtG flagged considerations for organisations that were not dedicated sex work outreach and support services but that offer support to people following incidents of sexual abuse/violence such as:

- The availability of a local specialist sex work ISVA or if not support staff are appropriately trained and aware of specific referral routes.
- Health services, who may be the only service a sex worker accesses if they have experienced sexual or physical violence, need either to confidently signpost sex workers to supportive, non-judgmental services or be trained to deliver services to sex worker victims.
- Training for all staff and volunteer teams in mainstream sexual violence services including SARCs and Rape Crisis Centres to ensure an environment within which sex workers are able to talk openly about the circumstances of the rape/assault without feeling judged or stigmatised. Training identified included: prevalence of rape/sexual assault within sex work; the importance of discretion and anonymity; diversity of the sex-industry; on-line sex work specifics; appropriate language, legality, barriers to accessing mainstream sexual violence services; details about sex work projects or organisations that offer a specific service for sex workers.
- Ensuring sex workers are aware of special measures available if the case goes to court and how this can protect their anonymity. The stigma, fear and shame that some survivors of sexual violence experience can be exacerbated for sex workers due to the risk of public identification and 'outing' or their credibility being questioned when sex work is mentioned.
- Providing information on websites and organisational social media which speaks to OLSWs and describes services sensitively on sex work related platforms.

Some projects who supported OLSWs noted also the importance of access to specialist support for OLSWs of all genders, within projects or their referral networks, for those sex workers who experience of domestic violence/abuse. Again, it was highlighted that such support should be part of a non-judgemental approach which recognises; this is an issue for all in society and hence some people in sex work will be affected and particular issues that sex workers may face, such as threats to out their sex working status as part of abuse and control.

## Emotional support and safe space

Emotional support provided by outreach and support workers was identified by sex workers as a useful area of provision for those who needed it. For some, non-judgemental listening ear support was seen to be useful;

*'You're just treated like a normal person...you can just chat and there's no judgement or anything like that. They know what you're talking about...It's not like a, 'Oh gosh!', kind of thing and there's just no judging or anything like that I would feel a lot more isolated and a lot less safe, a lot less like somebody's got your back.'* - **Independent and agency escort, CIS female**

*'I go to X (local project supporting male sex workers). I don't go to the group sessions anymore due to me anxiety ...I've known X (outreach and support worker) for a few years now so I can sit down and talk to them anytime.'* - **Independent escort, CIS male**

Some sex workers flagged that emotional support could be useful for those who wanted help to manage emotional labour and the impact of working in a stigmatised profession (Day and Ward 2004). Many people described how managing double lives or 'duality' (Bowen 2016), including for some not being able to share concerns with family, friends or colleagues (in the case of lone workers or those combining sex work with 'straight jobs') could be stressful. This is something highlighted in a range of research (Bowen 2018; Benoit et al 2007; Sanders 2005).

Others stressed the importance of access to emotional support for those sex workers in a crisis or having a difficult time, who may want to seek support:

*'I am an extremely tough cookie...but not everyone is and even I have moments where I have a wobble. Some might have a really awful experience where, if they could talk to someone, it would take a weight off them that maybe they can't talk to friends about'.* - **Dominatrix, CIS Female**

Access to non-judgemental more structured counselling and therapeutic support, which did not make assumptions about individuals experiences and feelings about their sex work, or the relationship between any mental health issues and sex work, was identified as important (Mai et al. 2017; Macioti et al. 2017). Peer support has also been identified as enhancing mental health for people in the sex industry (Macioti et al et al 2017). Projects can have a role in promoting existing peer support groups online and in person and enabling the development of such.

See later sub section

## Rights, legal information and advice

The provision of legal information and advice was one area of provisions that both sex workers and project contributors identified as relevant for OLSWs. This included both legal information related directly to laws on sex work (e.g. brothel management legislation) and a broader range of legal issues for example related to privacy, harassment (and other crimes experienced), employment rights in sex work and non-sex work jobs, housing, safeguarding and immigration.

Some projects were able to provide information and advice about certain legal issues and to signpost to other information resources or legal rights advice organisations. Some had developed partnership and referral pathways with specific organisations who could provide specialist advice in specific areas for example immigration rights or had links with solicitors who had experience of advising sex workers. For migrant sex workers information and advice about immigration matters was seen as an important area for advisory work.

## Self-employment, tax and other business matters .....

Providing information and advice about self-employment, national insurance, tax and other business-related matters was identified as an area that OLSWs felt projects could have a role and some projects did provide support in these areas; some had developed expertise in these areas whilst others worked with partners or could signpost people to online and other resources. Some projects have found some migrant sex workers had accessed information about registering as self employed and for national insurance and this was an important area for them as this could shape immigration status and rights to remain/work.

Some OLSWs pointed out that peer support could be useful particularly in relation to self-employment matters, with sex workers able to share and guide others regarding requirements for self-employment, national insurance, registering for tax, using accountancy services and a wide range of matters relating to business development. A key finding from BtG was the use of online sex work forums and private groups for peer support for several functions including business networking and sharing information for example about social media marketing, payment systems, website development and brand development (Sanders 2017).

## ..... Housing and welfare benefits information and advice

OLSWs are a diverse group including in relation to income levels (Sanders *et. al.* 2017), standards of living and housing status. Some projects noted they provided support for some in the sector related to a range of welfare benefits, housing and debt, particularly for those experiencing precarity, poverty and hardship. Several projects noted how demand for such support had been heightened at a time of austerity and changes to benefits.

Also, some OLSWs identified that advice related to specific issues faced by some sex workers regarding housing could be useful for example: landlords evicting sex workers when they became aware of their work, harassment from neighbours, landlords charging higher than market rate rents to OLSWs. As with wider legal advice, some projects had expertise in some of these matters and others had agreed referral pathways with welfare rights, housing or debt advisory services.

## Online promotion and presence in sex work community spaces .....

Both sex workers and projects felt it was important that projects reach out and let OLSWs know they are there if they need them, through online promotion and having appropriate and sensitive presence on sex worker community forums and spaces. This was identified as both important for letting OLSWs know about services and building relationships with the community. How projects can do this sensitively has been discussed in section four.

*'I don't think they do enough for online sex workers...if they engaged with the community and engaged in subjects and topics that were on there and spent time having a look and saying, "Oh yes, that's a good idea'...if they engaged that way, they probably wouldn't seem as remote' - Independent male escort*



## Drop-in provisions and groups

Some OLSWs who took part in BtG interviews identified drop-in spaces as something that could meet the needs of those in the sector who wanted to access the organisation and its information advice and support services at its base, in a safe space:



*'I think it, it gives people a space to go and a chance to kind of air over any problems they've got...not many people would know that you do this for a living... a safe place where you could do that' - Independent Escort and Webcammer, CIS Female*

Several projects also flagged drop-ins as provisions that were working well for OLSWS they worked with, where these were identified they were sessions specifically for OLSWS;

*'Holding a specialist drop in for online sex workers sex workers to help reduce isolation and build community' - Outreach worker, third sector sex work project*

Several projects provided drop in provisions specifically for on-line and indoor sex workers. As part of this some brought in other agencies or specialists to offer services, expertise or activities identified by the group e.g. legal rights, sexual health, therapeutic sessions such as managing stress at work, personal safety for lone workers, screening, website and business development. Drop-ins were also seen as a way to enable OLSWs to develop peer support and sex worker led initiatives. Some groups were sex worker led and provided a basis from which to develop further peer initiatives and greater sex worker inclusion in project planning and delivery.

Yet, some OLSWs made it clear that drop-ins and groups did not interest them for a range of reasons for example: simply not their thing, the location was not convenient, preferred to network with other sex workers and get information and support online, for confidentiality and privacy considerations they would rather not go to a project base or they did not want to meet other project staff, volunteers or sex workers face to face in a drop-in or group context.

## Enabling spaces and opportunities for peer support, sex worker led initiatives, voice and advocacy

As discussed in Section two promoting sex worker inclusion, community empowerment and peer education are part of good practice principles identified in international guidance for health and other services for sex workers. Providing opportunities for such and supporting such initiatives was one of the activities sex workers in BtG felt projects could engage in and would be useful for online sex workers. As this is an important area of practice Section two has provided some guidance about sex worker inclusion in the context of OLSW.

*'I feel like the big use of projects is mostly about showing solidarity and getting people connected so they can support each other' - Female independent escort, CIS Female*



Several projects had developed peer support initiatives, some described how they promoted existing SW forums and groups, some worked with sex worker rights organisations or supported their work. For example, in the survey of projects, one third sector organisation identified the key thing which they saw as good practice was: 'Partnership with local peer led sex worker organisations'.

Another area of activity some OLSWs who contributed to BtG felt projects could contribute was advocacy, policy influencing and challenging stigma. In this context, this was advocacy to impact changes in policies and practices which can improve the health, safety and rights of sex work The following quote illustrates this:

*'The kind of support that I need is probably like policy support... to create a safer working environment. ...the main thing that would help with my work is decriminalisation' - Independent escort, CIS Female*

The extent to which projects carried out policy influencing and advocacy work at a local and national level varied. Some were active in advocating locally for approaches which enhanced sex worker safety and health and challenged stigma, seeing it as part of their role as practitioners to share how local practices or approaches impact on safety, health, welfare and rights. Some were supportive of various campaigns, including for changes to national laws on sex work, others less so; some worked within organisations where campaigning work was restricted by organisational policy.

**Basis Sex Work Project, Leeds** has had various campaigns for example '17 Days of Action' in the run up to 17th December, International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers. Also, the 'Our Voices' campaign which involved sex workers in the production of a range of statements and images in the forms of alternative 'tart cards'. Examples of statements include; 'Why should we not be equal to everyone else', '5ft 4 Blonde, mother, aspiring teacher, daughter, pianist, cat-lover'. These were then used in social media messaging to challenge stigma and stereotypes about sex work and provide an ongoing resource which can be used in online marketing and social media. Basis regularly share information about, and comment on, local and national policy issues related to sex work, including in their social media presence.



[www.basisyorkshire.org.uk/blog/voices-book-launch](http://www.basisyorkshire.org.uk/blog/voices-book-launch)

In relation to the use of ICT tools by projects, INDOORS (2014b) explored how not only are they useful for netreach but they can have a role in advocacy and empowerment work. This included advocating for policy change to raise awareness of sex workers situation locally and nationally, taking part in public debate, informing media networks, opposing repressive policies which impact on the health and safety of sex workers and enabling sex worker rights activism. Also sharing information for example disseminating up to date policy and research reports, providing information about services and rights in a range of languages. INDOORS (2014b) found amongst its participating organisational partners:

*'ICT tools are effective channels for sharing messages, campaigns, information on awareness raising events and significant dates, and for promoting civic participation and health education. They are also important for gaining support and solidarity through visibility... Advocacy work via ICT tools allows organisations to influence the opinions of policy makers, stakeholders and other NGO's' (pg.59)*

## A note on support to leave sex work

Research has highlighted how stigma and discrimination faced by sex workers, not only contributes to isolation, but are key reasons for difficulties when some wish to leave sex work. As touched on in section two there is a need for awareness and sensitivity when projects offer support around transition into non-sex work jobs or other roles to OLSW. It is important to be sensitive and not to use stigmatising language, approach sex workers as all wanting or needing to 'exit' sex work or to assume that all those who want to transition from sex work need support to do so as *'with or without the support of organizations, people continuously enter and leave the industry'*. (Bowen 2015 pg. 432). Bowen referred to the 'invisibility' of OLSWs in the research on 'exiting' much of which has focused on street sex work.

Research has highlighted how approaches to leaving sex work which present sex work only as *'a harmful and dangerous profession that people are trapped in, escaping or have survived'* (Bowen 2015 pg. 429) are limiting. They do not reflect all experiences and the complexities of peoples lived experiences. For example, Bowen (2015) identified different groups of people in her study of online sex work including; *'Sex-Work-No-More participants who would not return to the industry, Sex-Work-Maybe participants who consider reinvolvement, and Dual-Life participants who are employed in sex work and conventional work simultaneously'* (pg. 429). Some have suggested an intersectional approach (O'Neill and Campbell 2010) which recognises how transitioning is shaped by different structural factors, personal

biographies and skills, as well as people's experiences of and engagement with sex work (Bowen 2015).

Others have identified how transitioning support can focus on building on the strengths and resources of the person who wants to transition and not on treating their sex work experience as harmful in itself, which can for some reinforce internalised stigma (Bowen 2013, 2016). Bowen (2015) recommends a continuum of support for transition for indoor sex workers that recognises the varied needs of people in sex work in terms of financial, emotional, educational needs and encompasses,

*'age-appropriate and culturally relevant gendered supports, financial literacy, housing, personal and career exploration and entrepreneurialism, and opportunities for seclusion and contemplation identified in studies of transition'*. (pg. 446)

## Support for drugs and alcohol issues

Whilst most OLSWs in the BtG research did not identify as having current or former problems with drugs and/or alcohol, a small minority did. Projects need to be sensitive not to make any assumptions. Projects working with OLSWs who also worked with street sex workers noted that in their experience there were lower levels of problematic drug and alcohol use amongst OLSWs, compared to the people they worked with in the street sector (especially regarding Class A problematic use of heroin and crack- this is reflected in current research). Yet projects and some sex workers identified that there could be specific issues for some people in the online sector in relation to drug use, for example developing problems with 'party drugs' (such as ecstasy, GHB) or stimulants such as cocaine following use linked to work. Also, projects working with male sex workers flagged ChemSex and health issues that can arise, as something that could affect some male sex workers. Hence having some knowledge and experience in teams of drug and alcohol harm reduction, drugs support and counselling, referral arrangements or partnership links to drug and alcohol services was identified as useful for responding to the needs of this cohort of OLSWs. Yet, it is important to be aware that if support around drugs and alcohol is a primary focus of your work and expertise, this will not be seen by many OLSWs as relevant to their needs.



[www.lgbt.foundation/chemsex](http://www.lgbt.foundation/chemsex)

## Working with migrant sex workers .....

Online migrant sex workers face many of the barriers to accessing health and other support services faced by nationals, yet some of these can be heightened, and there are additional barriers for migrants (Mai 2009; UKNSWP 2008b; Platt et al. 2011). Some of these were identified by sex workers and projects who contributed to BtG and include:

- Limited knowledge of UK services including; what's available, how to access, rights and entitlements.
- Heightened distrust of services and authorities including health workers and people from other support services.
- Fear of action regarding immigration status, particularly for people with irregular or undocumented immigration status.
- Language barriers.
- Control and isolation by coercive third parties, for those migrants experiencing trafficking or other forms of exploitation.
- Cultural Issues: some issues may be taboo or more stigmatised in some countries of origin making it more difficult to discuss for example sexual health or mental health.
- Some migrant sex workers may have no recourse to public funds which blocks access to certain welfare entitlements.

.....

The five main vulnerability factors for migrant sex workers in the UK identified by TAMPEP (2009b) were social isolation and exclusion, lack of access to health care, legal status, violence and lack of protection from the law, these endure. Some of the key issues migrants required support around identified in existing UK research (Mai 2008; UKNSWP 2008b) and guidance include:

- **Sexual and reproductive health:** migrant sex workers have many of the same sexual health needs as UK sex workers but there are some additional considerations and needs UKNSWP (2008b).
- **Primary health care:** a proportion of migrants are not registered with GP's, there are challenges re eligibility for undocumented migrants and self-medication for a range of health conditions is found at higher levels for some migrant sex work groups working in the UK (Ayres, 2014).
- Language skills
- Immigration issues, rights to work/self-employment, national insurance.
- Debt, finance, welfare benefits.
- Housing.
- Support if a victim of crime.
- Domestic violence.
- Legal issues relating to sex working.
- Exploitation, coercion and trafficking.
- Social stigma, isolation, emotional support.
- Training, education and alternative employment.

The BtG practitioners' group and mapping of projects identified some initiatives to make online support more accessible to migrant sex workers. Whilst the proportion of migrant people in the OLSW sector reported by projects varied across areas, most projects felt migrants formed a significant portion of workers in the online market. Methods shared included;

- Translating marketing netreach messages, information resources and their organisational website into languages used by the key local migrant sex work populations.
- Using interpretation services, supporting staff to learn key languages or appointing staff with relevant language skills and lived experience within migrant communities.
- Being clear that services are open to all migrants no matter what their situation (whether working independently or experiencing forms of coercion and control).
- Community development including recruiting volunteers from migrant communities.
- Peer education initiatives with migrant sex workers: the following quote from a migrant sex worker who contributed to BtG is illustrative of the value of migrant sex worker inclusion as peer educators;

.....

*'It's hard to approach people from outside this country in a way that they will not be scared of. Possibly employ or get volunteers from the sex industry that are willing to pass on the message and try and connect both....As a sexual worker I don't trust outsiders. As a Bulgarian, I don't trust outsiders.... the key is to find someone from that background and try and create a trust type of relationship' - independent/ agency escort and dominatrix, CIS Female*

.....

<sup>10</sup> **TAMPEP** has long advocated for cultural mediation and peer education approaches as effective for health and support work with migrant sex workers (Lempp and Mansbrügge 1999; TAMPEP 2009a, pg.18) in all sectors of the sex industry. Cultural mediators are 'Go betweens who know the rationale, the customs and the mores of the majority culture and the host country, as well as the conditions, social ethics and the scene in which the minority group operates' (Brussa 1998). Peer educators from the migrant sex work community are 'members of the migrant sex worker community who have migration experiences and backgrounds that reflect those of the broader community of migrant sex workers'. (**TAMPEP 2009a, pg.18**)

## Case study:

### **POW Migrant Netreach Initiative**

POW is a third sector charity working with sex workers in Nottingham including OLSWs. POW began to conduct netreach in 2014 and found an increase in migrant sex workers advertising online, but low numbers of migrants accessing services. In recognition of additional barriers, social marginalisation, varying needs, legal and cultural issues for migrants, POW developed a Migrant Sex Worker Coordinator post resourced by Big Lottery funding. This role enables a dedicated approach with a specific focus on providing support and tools of empowerment for migrant sex workers. The worker is a native Romanian speaker and speaks several other languages. They initially focused on building links and trust within the migrant sex worker community, using a community development approach and conducting netreach designed to approach and engage migrant sex workers in Nottingham. They work closely with the Law Centre around complex issues associated with immigration, housing and benefits. POW have found the approach to have considerable success in improving access for migrants; after an initial period approximately thirty migrant sex workers new to POW accessed the service, including an increase in migrant workers accessing the POW sexual health service. Other sex workers in the same premises or acquaintances of migrants who have accessed POW, then use it after the service has been vouched for. Such peer referral has overcome initial distrust of POW amongst some migrant workers, who were fearful of being reported to the authorities if they used POW. Many of the migrant sex workers POW supports are OLSWs. POW continues to monitor and evaluate the approach.

## Gender inclusivity

Much of the advice and guidance we have given in this document applies to sex workers of all genders whether cis female or male, trans female, trans male, non-binary, or for those who may disclose a trans history.

Male and transgender sex workers can face specific barriers to accessing services because of their gender and/or sexuality. Men may form a minority of those involved in sex work but in many areas of the UK they are there in significant numbers.

Many CIS male and transgender workers are OLSWs yet they may be over looked in policy and practice discussions, practitioners need to be mindful of this. For example, if sex work is only discussed and services commissioned under the violence against women and girl's agenda. If a project is funded only to work with females, then it must also include those who are legally defined as female in law through a Gender Recognition Certificate (GIC). Such projects may find it less discriminatory to be inclusive of anyone who identifies as female. Likewise, transgender men should not be over-looked when a project targets male sex workers. Projects should, wherever possible, be inclusive, not exclusive.

If providing online sexual health advice to trans people assumptions should not be made about an individual's genitalia as they may or may not have had lower surgery.

For projects working with sex workers it is useful to reflect on the language used by practitioners, in promotional material and other resources (including those that are online), around gender identity and how inclusive it is. Some transgender or non-binary workers may reject he/she or even favour the use of they/them. Consulting the community and respectfully asking each person how they prefer to be referred to can be helpful. Some online platforms used by TSWs for marketing use terms like TS (transsexual) or TV (transvestite) but many of those involved find these terms inaccurate or offensive.

There are online spaces which are used for marketing more by sex workers of certain genders for example certain ones are used more by men who sell sexual services to other men, whilst others are more utilised by transgender women workers. A project may need to consider how they can ensure that they are reaching out to all sectors of the community including LGBTQ.



Further support and information for TSW can be found at: [www.cliniq.org.uk](http://www.cliniq.org.uk) and [www.transactions.space](http://www.transactions.space)

<sup>10</sup> **TAMPEP** International Foundation is the European Network for HIV/STI Prevention and Health Promotion among Migrant Sex Workers. It was established to address and overcome barriers faced by migrant sex workers in Western Europe in accessing health services and HIV/STI prevention programmes.

*It's important to note that sex workers and projects also flagged that organisations should not presume the sexuality of people of OLSWs of any gender who use their services.*

## Holistic and needs led support .....

In this section, we have discussed the key areas of support OLSWs sex workers who took part in BtG identified as relevant. This will not be comprehensive, these come from a particular sample of online sex workers, who while diverse in many ways will not capture all experiences. Indeed, BtG was a study focused on independent workers. Projects involved in BtG and OLSWs noted that the issues and needs people bring can be very varied and specific to an individual. We encourage projects to adopt a flexible, holistic, person-centred, needs led approach, which respects the needs, experiences and identities of individuals. Through partnership and advocacy work they should be able to signpost and support people to access other services where required.

## Networking with other health and support services .....

Networking with other health and support organisations who provide services for sex workers can be invaluable when seeking to establish or develop services, enabling the sharing of practice. Some projects will have expertise with specific areas of provision. You can always approach National Ugly Mugs for contact information for services. The BtG and NUM Practitioners Forum which has been in place during BtG will continue, coordinated by National Ugly Mugs.

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## 6. Resources and useful links



This section contains links to some useful existing resources and information about; working with online sex workers, netreach, use of information and communication technology (ICT) by sex workers and projects working with them.

### Correlation: European Harm Reduction Network .....

**Correlation: European Harm Reduction Network** (formerly European Network for Social Inclusion and Health) aims to improve access to and quality of services for marginalised and vulnerable groups including sex workers. It produced several resources related to support for sex workers and also resources for netreach and e-health. These included:

- Policy briefing on E-health

A short briefing on E-health *'Does it make sense? Outreach on the internet'*. Download at:

[www.correlation-net.org/images/stories/pdfs/products\\_corr2/ehealth\\_paper\\_web.pdf](http://www.correlation-net.org/images/stories/pdfs/products_corr2/ehealth_paper_web.pdf)

*Ten Golden Rules CD-ROM* was designed to support projects to start 'electronic outreach and e-counselling' and contains strategies for e-health, examples, guidelines and methodologies for professionals, software and good practices for e-health and e-outreach. This provides some useful general guidance.

[www.correlation-net.org/index.php/products-correlation](http://www.correlation-net.org/index.php/products-correlation)

- Social Intervention Tool (SIT)

SIT (see section 4) was designed as a not for profit chat tool, which is easily accessible and affordable which could be used by smaller organisations without large budgets for internet outreach. It is designed to be used for multiple purposes and was developed by an expert group from the Correlation Network who had experience of working with marginalised or vulnerable people, such as drug users, sex workers, men who have sex with men and young people at risk. Find out more:

[www.sittool.eu/index.html](http://www.sittool.eu/index.html)

**Please note at the time of writing Correlation announced it would be launching a new web platform.**

### Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP) .....

- NSWP (2016) 'Smart Service Provider's Guide to ICT and Sex Work'

As part of its smart guide series NSWP published the guide to ICT and Sex Work in 2016 which it described as, 'a resource for service providers who want to better understand how Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have impacted sex workers and the prevention of HIV. This guide draws on global examples and identifies good and bad practice for development and implementing ICT outreach services, based on consultation with sex workers and NSWP member organisations'. Download it at:

[www.nswp.org/resources/types/nswp-smart-guides](http://www.nswp.org/resources/types/nswp-smart-guides)

- Global Network of Sex Work Projects (2018) 'Meaningful Involvement of Sex Workers' Download it at:

[www.nswp.org/sites/nswp.org/files/meaningful\\_involvement\\_document\\_en.pdf](http://www.nswp.org/sites/nswp.org/files/meaningful_involvement_document_en.pdf)

NSWP produced this briefing note as a practical tool for organisations to self-assess whether they meaningfully involve sex workers, and for sex worker-led organisations to assess whether they are meaningfully involved.

This followed on from an earlier more detailed briefing on 'The meaningful involvement of sex workers in the development of health services' (2017), which will be of use to organisations delivering health services for online sex workers.

[www.nswp.org/sites/nswp.org/files/briefing\\_paper\\_meaningful\\_involvement\\_in\\_health\\_services\\_nswp\\_-\\_2017.pdf](http://www.nswp.org/sites/nswp.org/files/briefing_paper_meaningful_involvement_in_health_services_nswp_-_2017.pdf)

NSWP (2015) Mapping and Population Size Estimates of Sex Workers: Proceed with Extreme Caution, available at:

[www.nswp.org/resource/mapping-and-population-size-estimates-sex-workers-proceed-extreme-caution](http://www.nswp.org/resource/mapping-and-population-size-estimates-sex-workers-proceed-extreme-caution)

This provides an overview and critique of mapping, sex worker population size estimates and their use. It highlights how mapping locations where sex workers live and work and estimating the size of sex worker populations are becoming more regularly carried out. It considers some of the threats associated with these and strategies that can be used to protect people safe and keep data confidential and secure.

NSWP (2015): The Smart Sex Worker’s Guide to SWIT

[www.nswp.org/resource/the-smart-sex-worker-s-guide-swit](http://www.nswp.org/resource/the-smart-sex-worker-s-guide-swit)

This provides a short summary of the key points contained in the World Health Organisation Sex Worker Implementation Tool, included later in this section.

## INDOORS Project

[www.indoors-project.eu](http://www.indoors-project.eu)

The web based platform from the INDOORS Project has a range of downloadable resources. The INDOORS project aimed to produce empowerment and skills building tools for national and migrant female sex workers working in hidden places. Whilst most of the resources would be relevant to working with sex workers online those that are particularly useful and relevant to working with online sex workers and netreach include the following:

- INDOORS Project (2014): Flexible use of information technologies: the development, implementation of information and communication technologies in outreach, advocacy and empowerment, Autres Regards.

[www.indoors-project.eu/documents/Flexible\\_use\\_of\\_information\\_technologies.pdf](http://www.indoors-project.eu/documents/Flexible_use_of_information_technologies.pdf)

This is a comprehensive and detailed resource which aims to ‘explore ways of applying information and communication technology in outreach work, advocacy, empowerment and beyond’ (pg. 7), it was produced by INDOORS partner agencies across nine European countries, who served as examples of planning, development, implementation and evaluation. The projects who took part came together for training/skills building, then developed their own netreach strategies, implemented a range of methods, evaluated these and came together to discuss the shortcomings and successes and the potential for their use in the future.

- INDOORS Project (2015) Peer Education in Sex Work: a guide on the development and implementation of peer education methodologies within the context of sex work in eight European Countries, Autres Regards

[www.indoors-project.eu/documents/FINALpeereducation.pdf](http://www.indoors-project.eu/documents/FINALpeereducation.pdf)

This describes best practice in peer education developed by partner agencies in eight European countries. It covers sex workers as peers detailing what is needed for effective peer education initiatives, a model for training detailing the content of the workshops for sex worker peers, training in eight countries which describes how the model was adapted locally and recommendations from the program.

- INDOORS Project (2014) Outreach in Indoor Sex Work Settings, Autres Regards.

[www.indoors-project.eu/documents/FINALoutreach.pdf](http://www.indoors-project.eu/documents/FINALoutreach.pdf)

Drawing on the work of projects in nine EU countries this reports on a mapping exercise using outreach (with different methods of outreach used ) including both face to face and via online information technology. The mapping from across the different countries identifies trends in the indoor sex work sector and the support strategies that partner agencies were using. Each of the local areas is looked at through the themes of outreach methodology, sex work scene, sex work venues and working conditions, the main needs of sex workers, mobility, violence and discrimination and isolation. The report contains national overviews which consider the themes of structure of indoor sex work, impact of migration on the working conditions and living conditions of sex workers, safer sex and vulnerability factors linked to HIV/STI’s, national and international mobility, violence and discrimination and isolation.

## International Committee for the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe (ICRSE) .....

**The International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe (ICRSE)** is a sex worker-led network representing more than hundred organisations led by or working with sex workers in Europe and Central Asia. It has a range of resources at; [www.sexworkeurope.org](http://www.sexworkeurope.org)

- ICRSE (2017): Understanding Sex Workers Right to Health, ICRSE.

[www.sexworkeurope.org/sites/default/files/userfiles/files/ICRSE\\_Briefingpaper\\_HEALTH RIGHTS\\_October2017\\_A4\\_PRINT\\_02.pdf](http://www.sexworkeurope.org/sites/default/files/userfiles/files/ICRSE_Briefingpaper_HEALTH RIGHTS_October2017_A4_PRINT_02.pdf)

This is a briefing paper which aims to provide *'an advocacy and activism tool for sex workers and allies to promote sex workers' health rights and to develop a better understanding of different factors affecting sex workers' health'*. The tool should underpin effective health programmes. This briefing paper focuses on several issues. Firstly, it explores what is the right to health and what does the right to mean to sex workers. Secondly, it gives an insight on how criminalisation and legal oppression impact on sex workers' health, and analyses relationship between sex work, violence and mental health. Finally, it highlights the basic principles of sex workers' occupational health and safety needs.

## Sex Work Research Hub .....

**The Sex Work Research Hub (SWRH)** provides a space for researchers, sex worker support organisations, sex worker right organisations and registered PhD students involved in research related to sex work to; share information, run seminars, lectures and affiliated events and support and provide research. The governance of the SWRH is underpinned by participatory and collaborative principles that centralize and respect the lives and experiences of sex workers.

The hub is developing a practical resource on participatory action research and sex work, which will be published later in 2018 and available here:

[www.york.ac.uk/sociology/research/current-research/swrh/#tab-1](http://www.york.ac.uk/sociology/research/current-research/swrh/#tab-1)

and at their blog: [www.swrh.co.uk/blog](http://www.swrh.co.uk/blog)

## TAMPEP .....

**TAMPEP International Foundation** is the European Network for HIV/STI Prevention and Health Promotion among Migrant Sex Workers. The Tampep website contains a wide range of resources to inform work with migrant sex workers'. It is an international networking and intervention project operating in 25 EU countries. It advocates for the human and civil rights of female and transgender migrant sex workers and facilitates the sharing of knowledge, experience and good practice amongst members to develop and implement effective strategies of HIV and STI prevention amongst migrant sex workers across Europe.

- TAMPEP (2009a) Work Safe in Sex Work A European Manual on Good Practices in Work with and for Sex Workers, Tampep International Foundation.

[www.tampep.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/wssw\\_2009\\_final.pdf](http://www.tampep.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/wssw_2009_final.pdf)

This publication aims to give examples of good practice for health and social service providers offering care for migrant and mobile sex workers in indoor and outdoor settings, provide examples of different experiences of HIV/STI prevention strategies and to give examples of innovative tools for practice outreach, peer education, campaigns for clients and advocacy campaigns. Amongst the examples of outreach are two netreach initiatives, one looking at netreach within a UK project (SCOT-PEP in Scotland) and the URHO project delivered by Pro-Tukipiste in Finland, for male and transgender sex workers which aimed to observe and contact sex workers who promote commercial sexual services via the Internet. The latter included netreach in a chat room environment, on various advertisement platforms, an online advice service a range of issues including safer sex, health, accommodation, income, employment, legal issues and other relevant topics.

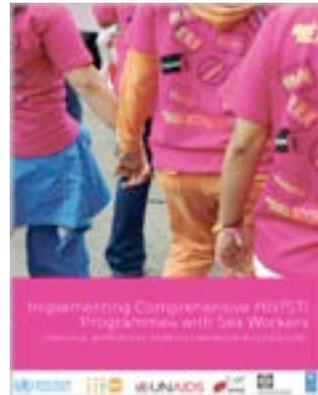
This publication provides a wealth of practical examples of good practice, especially for those working with migrant sex workers and also of effective peer education initiatives. The examples were selected based on three key criteria: the intervention included the active participation of sex workers in design, implementation and evaluation; the intervention had been evaluated and it was transferable to other situations and countries.

## World Health Organisation (WHO) .....

World Health Organisation, United Nations Population Fund, Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, global network of sex work projects, world bank and united nations development programme (2013) *Implementing comprehensive HIV/STI programmes with sex workers: practical approaches from collaborative interventions:*

[www.who.int/hiv/pub/sti/sex\\_worker\\_implementation/en](http://www.who.int/hiv/pub/sti/sex_worker_implementation/en)

Referred to as the 'Sex Worker Intervention Tool' SWIT, this was designed as a tool to be used by public health officials and managers of HIV, AIDS and STI programmes; NGOs such as community and civil-society organizations; and health workers and if offers practical advice on implementing HIV and STI programmes for sex workers. It gives examples of good practice from around the world to 'support efforts in planning programmes and services and describes issues that should be considered and how to overcome challenges'. (pg. XIV)



It covers 6 key areas; community empowerment which it places at the heart of good program development, addressing violence against sex workers, community-led services, condom and lubricant planning, clinical and support services, program management and organisational capacity building. It describes eight key elements of community empowerment;

- Working with communities of sex workers and meaningful participation.
- Promoting a human rights framework.
- Fostering sex worker-led outreach.
- Strengthening the collective.
- Developing sex worker collectives.
- Shaping policy and creating enabling environments.
- Adapting to local needs and contexts.
- Sustaining the movement.

Examples of interventions delivered through a community empowerment model given include; sustained engagement with local sex workers to raise awareness about sex worker rights, the establishment of community led safe spaces (drop-in centres), the formation of collectives that determine the range of services to be provided, as well as outreach and advocacy.

### WHO HIV/AIDS sex work toolkit

WHO has produced a HIV/AIDS and Sex Work Toolkit for those involved in HIV prevention with sex workers. It aims to make accessible knowledge and guidance accumulated over a decade in published and unpublished reports about what works for HIV prevention with sex workers, how to provide support services, and how to empower sex workers to improve their health and well-being. This is available online at:

[www.who.int/hiv/topics/vct/sw\\_toolkit/en/](http://www.who.int/hiv/topics/vct/sw_toolkit/en/)

## UK Network of Sex Work Projects (UKNSWP) .....

UKNSWP (predecessor to National Ugly Mugs) produced a series of five good practice guidance documents for sex work projects and agencies working with sex workers. Whist some content may now be out of date, they do share practice around the following; outreach (touched on netreach), working with migrant sex workers, working with male sex workers and transgender sex workers, 'exiting' and ugly mugs.

For copies go to:

**Ugly Mugs** | [www.uknswp.org/um/uploads/uknswpUglyMugsGuideV1.pdf](http://www.uknswp.org/um/uploads/uknswpUglyMugsGuideV1.pdf)

**Outreach** | [www.uknswp.org/um/uploads/Working-With-SWs-Outreach.pdf](http://www.uknswp.org/um/uploads/Working-With-SWs-Outreach.pdf)

**Working with migrant sex workers** | [www.uknswp.org/um/uploads/Working-With-Migrant-SWs.pdf](http://www.uknswp.org/um/uploads/Working-With-Migrant-SWs.pdf)

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This document was published in September 2018. The content of this publication is for information purposes only, sharing some key learning points from Beyond The Gaze which practitioners may choose to consider in their work. Regulations for charities, social enterprises statutory sector bodies as well as wider policy and law related to sex work and online regulation, technology and the online terrain are constantly changing. Also some of the law and terminology relating to health and social care policy, data protection, safeguarding and other areas related to practice may not be applicable across the whole of the UK. Hence whilst the authors have tried to ensure the accuracy of the text, we accept no legal liability for any errors or omissions and would expect all developing practice to work within their own organisational policies and take steps to ensure their work is informed by current legislation and statutory guidance related to their work. Hence we advise practitioners and organisations to use this document as it is intended, a resource which shares some learning from research and practice at a particular point in time.

Department of Criminology  
University of Leicester,  
University Road,  
Leicester, LE1 7RH  
t: +44 (0)116 252 3946/2458  
e: [criminology@le.ac.uk](mailto:criminology@le.ac.uk)  
t: +44 (0)116 229 7859  
[www.le.ac.uk/criminology](http://www.le.ac.uk/criminology)

