

An advocate acts on behalf of another person or argues for a cause. An activist goes beyond arguing and takes action to achieve their aims.

Activism can take a lot of different forms, but common ways of lobbying for changes to laws or policies include protests, petitions, writing letters to local and national government officials and media interviews.

As the *WE&R Sex Workers' Workbook* puts it: "If you become known for organizing for the cause of sex workers, you will also likely be called upon to provide advocacy for individual workers. Many will need knowledgeable and sympathetic help with dealing with doctors or with social services; choosing lawyers and going to court; reporting crimes to the police, etc. Some people make a living providing such advocacy."

When agencies advocate of behalf of sex workers – whether in the media or in response to government inquiries – they should be helping sex workers say what they need and ensure that their voices are heard. When sex workers aren't part of the equation – when they don't take part, or are excluded – or when agencies present their own opinions based on their own agendas, the interests of sex workers aren't being served, plain and simple.

As the *WE&R Sex Workers' Workbook* says: "If you are part of a group that argues for the cause of sex workers, focus on increasing their involvement, rather than speaking for them."

If projects like SCOT-PEP don't have sex workers actively involved, serving on management committees, taking a leading role in determining the areas that they campaign in and bringing their extremely valuable experience to the table, then they cease to be valid advocacy or activist organisations.

There are plenty of projects that operate like this, without any input from the groups they say they serve. SCOT-PEP doesn't want to be one of them. Sex worker involvement has been a growing problem in Scotland, even as the number of agencies funded to work with sex workers has increased. Many women worry about the consequences of public exposure in a media that has not, as a rule, been particularly sympathetic in the past. Even with high levels of public support, for example for the continuation and then reinstatement of a tolerance zone for street prostitution, the political and media approach has been largely condemnatory.



### **Danny Cockerline (1960-1995)**

Just 21 when he joined the collective that produced *The Body Politic*, the infamous Toronto gay newspaper (1971-1987), Danny Cockerline started turning tricks after writing about sex work in 1984.

A member of the Canadian Organization for the Rights of Prostitutes, he founded the Prostitutes' Safe Sex Project in 1986, where he created Toronto's earliest safe sex education materials. He was also a founding member of SWAT (Sex Workers' Alliance of Toronto).

Cockerline was a porn star (he made two films, *Midnight Sun* and *In the Grip of Passion*) and posed for spreads in a number of gay magazines.

HIV positive, Danny didn't want to put his family through what he called a lingering AIDS death. He committed suicide in 1995 at the age of 35.

Every person has the right to say what they want and what they need when important decisions that affect their lives are being made by other people. Sometimes you might find it hard to say what you mean or make choices, sometimes you may feel that you're not being listened to or that your views aren't being treated as valid and important. If you find yourself feeling marginalized or left out of the discussion, you may need to have an advocate to help you fight your corner. An advocate is someone who will speak on your behalf or stand by you and support you while you speak up for yourself. They act to ensure that you are listened to and that your views are given the weight they deserve.

There are several different kinds of advocate – some are appointed by the government or by official bodies like the NHS and some work or volunteer for projects that provide advocates to anyone who needs them. There are also, most importantly, peer advocates and self-advocacy groups, who unite around common experiences or common causes.

### **Government-appointed advocates**

These are usually officially appointed advocates who provide services for groups of people who have trouble accessing, or getting what they need, from particular government services or departments. These are quite common in some parts of the world, but unusual in the UK, where local councils and bodies like the NHS tend to fulfill their obligation to make advocacy services available by funding independent projects that provide professional advocacy services (see below).

### **Independent professional advocates**

Projects that provide independent professional advocacy use either paid staff or trained volunteers. Most advocates will be supporting several people at a time, either on a range of issues or with an emphasis on one particular area of need. In Edinburgh, for example, the requirement of the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003, that people who have mental health difficulties be given access to independent advocacy services, has led to a wealth of projects that meet this need. Advocard, for example, has two services for people who use mental health services, one of which supports people with other issues in their life



### **Grisélidis Réal (1929-2005)**

Réal studied at the School of Decorative Arts in Zurich and became an artists' model when she graduated. She also studied classical piano with some gusto, which led her to later declare "I can pound a piano or a pervert – it's all the same to me, all in a good night's work". She was introduced to sex work in 1960, when a passing motorist stopped her as she walked in the countryside and offered her money to have sex in the back of his car. Her involvement in sex workers' rights began thirteen years later, in 1973, when prostitutes occupied Chapelle Saint-Bernard in Montparnasse, France. She helped found Aspasia, the first sex workers' association in Switzerland, and established the International Centre of Documentation about Prostitution in Geneva.

She wrote 3 books about her adventures in sex work: *Le Noir Est une Couleur* (1974), *Carnet de Bal d'une Courtisane* (1984) and *La Passe Imaginaire* (1992).

She died of cancer at the age of 72 in 2005; her body was recently reburied in the Cemetery of the Kings in Geneva, which is reserved for those who have had a profound effect on the history of Switzerland or the world.

and the other that supports them specifically with issues relating to their mental health treatment.

### **Citizen advocates**

Citizen advocacy is all about encouraging ordinary people to get involved in the lives of others in their community who need support. It is based on a relationship of trust, and the advocate's loyalty is to the person they are supporting, not to the advocacy project.

Citizen advocacy organizations recruit volunteers from the community and match them with someone who needs practical help and support to improve the quality of their lives. Some citizen advocacy groups exist to help people exercise their democratic rights, by providing information about the law in certain areas, such as elections, freedom of information, right to privacy and patient rights.

Citizen advocates are unpaid volunteers who commit to long-term, one-to-one relationships with their partner. They are often supported and trained by a citizen advocacy organization, but their loyalty will be to their partner.

Citizen advocacy organizations have been around in the UK, USA, Canada and Australia since the early 1970s.

### **Peer advocacy**

Peer advocacy is very similar to citizen advocacy, with one important distinction. A peer advocate will have something specific in common with their partner, which will usually be related to the advocacy work that they do. They may have a similar disability or share similar experiences, or both. Informal peer advocacy is common in groups of people who are marginalized by the community or by society because of who they are or what they do – such as sex workers.

### **Self-advocacy groups**

Self-advocacy is about speaking for yourself and making your own needs and opinions heard. Sometimes you may feel that you need support and training in order to achieve this – that's where self-advocacy groups come in. A self-advocacy group offers individual assistance and support to help you be a better advocate on your own behalf. These groups can also work together to address issues shared by their members and they are usually run and staffed by members of the group. They may also participate in group advocacy, where the members unite to campaign on issues that affect them all.



### **Paulo Henrique Longo (1964-2004)**

Born in Rio de Janeiro, Paulo Longo worked as a rent boy before becoming a clinical psychologist. He also wrote a regular newspaper column about gay rights.

In 1988 he became involved in HIV research with rent boys in Rio, and was horrified when the researchers wrongly reported high HIV infection rates. By 1989 he was working as an outreach worker for Programa Pegação, a project for male sex workers, which he later coordinated. In 1991 he co-founded the Network of Sex Work Projects, a global coalition of sex workers and advocates.

In 1997 he co-authored *Making Sex Work Safe*, a guide to providing services for sex workers. He was known for his eloquent speeches at AIDS conferences, public health meetings and international forums. In 2003 Rio de Janeiro City Council honoured him for his work defending human rights for gay, bisexual and transgendered people and sex workers.

He died of a heart attack in 2004, at the age of 40.

### How do I start a self-advocacy group?

SCOT-PEP would be delighted to help you if you want to start your own advocacy group, although we'd probably try to encourage you to get involved in SCOT-PEP in the first instance and see if we could work well together.

There are some great tips on setting up a self-advocacy group in the *WE&R Sex Workers' Workbook* – drop in to the SCOT-PEP office to browse our copy and have a look at the rest the materials in our library.

### What can self-advocacy do?

Sex worker advocacy groups have achieved great things around the world, from the repeal of unfair laws to the formation of sex worker unions that have won important battles for welfare rights and pension benefits.

A few of the things that sex worker advocates have focused on, and that you can do through SCOT-PEP or on your own, include:

#### Educational materials

Booklets, leaflets, stickers, posters, buttons, t-shirts, mouse pads, key chains, bumper stickers – pretty much everything imaginable has been emblazoned with sex worker slogans or information, from 'Shoot Clean, Fuck Safe, Dance Proud' to 'A Hooker Is A Person In Your Neighbourhood – Support Your Local Prostitutes'.

Rights, the law and sexual health have often been the focus for sex worker groups putting out information. SCOT-PEP has a huge collection of materials published by sex worker groups around the world, and many of the organizations listed at the end of this section have put their resources online in downloadable form.

#### Ugly Mug Reporting

Ugly Mugs schemes (also known as Bad Trick Sheets or Bad Call Lists) are designed to help sex workers warn each other about dodgy punters (or even members of the public), without necessarily having to go through the police. They are typically run by agencies that work with sex workers, who take down details of the Ugly Mug and pass the information on, anonymously, to other sex workers. See the information on Ugly Mugs in the Safety at Work section.

Ugly Mugs schemes usually consist of a description of the client, his car (if the incident happened on the street scene) and what happened. Ugly Mugs can be punters who've threatened, harassed, assaulted or stolen from sex workers.



### Emma Goldman (1869-1940)

Born in Lithuania, Emma Goldman emigrated to New York in 1889. She was an outspoken radical who lectured and wrote on anarchism and women's rights. At the age of 23 she tried to earn \$15 to buy a pistol by working as a prostitute on 14th Street in Manhattan; an older gentleman gave her \$10 and suggested she was in the wrong business.

She lived in a house on 3rd Street where all of the other residents were sex workers and she soon became a prostitutes' activist, accusing the women's movement of supporting laws that hurt working-class women. She claimed that a prostitute may have an advantage over a wife in that she can "retain her freedom and personal rights". "Why waste your life working for a few shillings a week in a scullery, 18 hours a day, when a woman could earn a decent wage by selling her body instead?"

She went to jail for telling the unemployed to steal bread, lecturing on birth control, and fighting against the draft. In 1908 she was stripped of her US citizenship, and died in Toronto of a stroke, at the age of 71.



### UKNSWP Library

In October 2008 the UK Network of Sex Work Projects (UKNSWP) set up a collection of sex work literature, the first of its kind in the UK, funded by the Big Lottery and member contributions. It is housed in the specialist collections library in the Robertson Trust Library and Learning Resource Centre at the Paisley Campus of the University of the West of Scotland.

The collection can be used by researchers, projects, police, media, local government, lawyers, refugee organizations, drug agencies, charities and students and staff registered with the University. If you want to borrow materials from the collection (as opposed to look at them there) you'll need to apply in advance unless you belong to an organization that is a member of the UKNSWP.

The collection is made up of books, journal articles, project reports, leaflets, research reports, posters about sex work in the UK and other countries. Some (but no where near all) of the subjects covered include sex worker rights, sex worker activism, safety, violence, policing, migrant sex work, legislation, clients of sex workers, tolerance zones, transgender sex work, ASBOs and international sex work.

The Special Collections Librarian, Allison Watson, is the contact point for accessing the collection. You can contact her on 0141 849 4240 or email [allison.watson@uws.ac.uk](mailto:allison.watson@uws.ac.uk)

Currently the Ugly Mugs scheme in Edinburgh is only officially running for street sex workers. Reports are gathered by other projects and the police and are coordinated by SCOT-PEP. SCOT-PEP has maintained the Ugly Mug Database since 1996 – a conviction was recently secured using evidence that was gathered 4 years previously.

### Sex work libraries

"How about starting your own private collection of sex work memorabilia? Building a library of information about sex work and prostitution provides a great learning project. And before long, your collection will evolve into an ever-growing educational resource that will entice other sex-work enthusiasts to visit, browse and borrow. Try for a broad range of genres and formats: pulp fiction and literature; music with hooker lyrics; popular movies and videos that feature prostitutes; educational brochures and newsletters from sex worker organizations; and some of the many works of research on prostitution – from the laudable to the infuriating. Before you know it, your comrades are making delightful contributions to your bookshelf."

- \$WE@&R Sex Workers' Workbook

Ruth Morgan Thomas started exactly such a collection in 1998; the SCOT-PEP library is a wonderful resource on sex work that is open for anyone involved in sex work to use. There is also the Special Collection on Sex Work at Paisley University – see sidebar.

### Media

Speaking to the media can seem like a great way of getting your message out into the wider world, but it can also be full of pitfalls. Generally, if the media contact an organisation for a statement about the latest sensational prostitution news, they already know what they're planning to write. All sex worker activists have been misquoted, censored and attacked in the press at some point, often repeatedly. Most groups are pretty fussy about who they'll speak to, and with good reason.

On the plus side, the 'sensationalist' approach to sex work can sometimes work in a positive way, in that the media will usually respond (in one way or another) to press releases issued by sex worker groups.

## Fundraising

There are all sorts of events that can be used to promote public education and support for sex worker issues while also raising a little cash. Burlesque shows, performance nights, film screenings, art shows, trade fairs and conferences have all been used by sex worker groups in the past. SCOT-PEP has organised the Whoresteria event at the Festival, had a stall at a Mark Thomas Fringe Festival gig, and worked with a local writer's group to run an evening of poetry reading, story-telling, music and burlesque.

Events take a lot of forward planning and preparation. You'll need posters and a way of getting them up around town, advertising in the local press, enough volunteers to run the door or stall, decorate, answer questions and clean up afterwards.

## Press clippings

Newspapers, local and national, can be a great source of information on news, events (such as community meetings and police raids), governmental legislation and policy, national and international affairs. Clipping articles can be a great way of following long-running stories, such as a court cases or changes in policy.

SCOT-PEP has been maintaining a clipping library on sex work issues in the UK and internationally since the dawn of time, and you're more than welcome to come in and browse our collection. Collecting clippings – or online news stories - that you come across to add to the SCOT-PEP archive would also be a great way of getting involved and helping us keep on top of what's going on in the wider world.



## The Declaration of the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe (2005)

The Declaration highlights violations of the rights of sex workers in Europe in health and social care, housing, employment, education, administrative law and criminal justice system and suggests ways that states can ensure that the rights of sex workers are respected.

It condemns the increase in local, national and international laws that restrict the fundamental rights and freedoms of sex workers in the name of combating organized crime and protecting public health. These laws are in direct contradiction of advice from UNAIDS and the World Health Organisation, which says that laws restricting the rights of sex workers undermines public health policies by driving the sex industry underground.

These laws are in violation of the obligation of States under international human rights law to respect, promote and protect the rights of people within their borders. The Declaration notes that "there is not one country within Europe – including those with regulated sex industries – where sex workers have not reported discrimination and violations of their human rights."

The Declaration argues that the right to work, to free choice of employment and to just and favourable conditions of work should indicate the decriminalisation of sex work, stating that "the lack of acknowledgement of sex work as labour or a profession has adverse consequences on the working conditions of sex workers and denies them access to protection provided by national and European labour legislation". The Declaration also demands that "sex workers should be entitled to equitable employment and social security benefits".

**Self regulation in India**

In 2005 there were an estimated 28,000 sex workers in Calcutta and its suburbs, 6,000 of which worked in the 'designated brothel district' called Sonagachi.

In February 1992 a small health care project was launched in Sonagachi, with new clinics providing free medical care for sex workers and their children. The project also set up a peer education programme, providing sex workers with uniforms and name tags and paying them to distribute condoms to the hundreds of brothels in the area. They set up a meeting space where sex workers could meet and hold social and cultural events and literacy classes.



As the Sonagachi Project continued, it realized the need for sex worker community empowerment and involvement. The Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DMSC) was born in 1995. Members paid small monthly dues and the group became active in advocacy, social activism, political lobbying and using the media to call attention to the needs of sex workers. They picketed brothels where owners refused to allow sex workers to use condoms and protested outside police stations when sex workers were harassed, they built schools for their members' children, opened a store that sold crafts made by local women and daily necessities to members at subsidized prices and established a co-operative society to provide low-interest loans.

14 years later, the DMSC has 65,000 members with branches in 66 sex work areas in West Bengal. In 1997 they organized the First National Conference of Sex Workers in India based around the slogan "Sex work is work – We demand worker's rights". They took over the Sonagachi Project in 1999.



**World Charter for Prostitutes' Rights (1985)**

The Charter calls for the decriminalisation of "all aspects of adult prostitution resulting from individual decisions" and demands that sex workers be guaranteed "all human rights and civil liberties," including the freedom of speech, travel, immigration, work, marriage, and motherhood, and the right to unemployment insurance, health insurance and housing.

The Charter also calls for the protection of "work standards," including abolishing laws that impose zoning of prostitution, and insists that sex workers have the freedom to choose where they work and live and how to conduct their business.

It also calls for sex workers to pay taxes "on the same basis as other independent contractors and employees," and to be entitled to receive state benefits on that basis.

**Law reform in New Zealand**

In 2003, after 3 years of scrutiny, 415 hours of debate and 222 public submissions, including many from sex workers and sex worker groups, New Zealand’s parliament passed the Prostitution Reform Act by a single vote.

- The Act decriminalises sex work and creates a framework that aims to, among other things:
- safeguard the human rights of sex workers
- protect them from exploitation
- promote the welfare, occupational health and safety of sex workers
- stop under 18s from getting involved in sex work

This reversal of hundreds of years of attempts to suppress, abolish and eradicate prostitution attracted huge international interest.

The Act also established a Prostitution Law Reform Committee (PLRC) to assess the number of sex workers in New Zealand and report back after 3 to 5 years on how well the Act was working, what impact of the Act had on the number of sex workers, what support was available to help sex workers leave the industry and any amendments to the Act or any other laws that might help.

Of the 11 members of the PLRC, 3 were nominated by the New Zealand Prostitutes’ Collective and 2 represented operators of prostitution businesses.

The PLRC reported back in May 2008 and found, despite what critics claimed when the law passed, there had not been a massive boom in the sex work industry in New Zealand. The majority of sex workers surveyed felt that the Act had improved their working conditions – they felt they had more rights, that they were more able to refuse clients, and that there had been an improvement in the levels of violence they experienced, but they still felt stigmatised and mistrustful of authority.

There will be another review in 2018. Meanwhile, the state of Western Australia based their 2008 prostitution law reform on the New Zealand approach, and perhaps the most intriguing endorsement comes from the UK’s own Women’s Institute, which in a 2008 investigation into prostitution law around the world decided that New Zealand had the best model for others to emulate.



**A note on research...**

Sex work projects are often asked to help with research, whether by putting researchers in contact with sex workers or by providing endless streams of data, interviews with staff and tagging along with outreach teams. It can be difficult to decide what needs to be prioritized and what amounts to completing someone’s final year project for them. Inexperienced researchers or students may also have difficulties with confidentiality and ethics, not from malice but from inexperience.

A good benchmark for valid, ethical research is whether or not the researcher has a letter of approval from the Research Ethic Committee. If they don’t, the UKNSWP recommends they be sent packing.

Good research should ensure the welfare – this includes their dignity, rights, safety and wellbeing, and confidentiality if that’s been assured – of participants and feed back results to them. If you take part in a research project and anything about it makes you feel uncomfortable, you have the right to walk out. Never agree to take part in research just because someone is persistent and won’t take no for an answer. If they have so little respect for your wishes when they’re courting you as a subject, how are they going to treat you after you’ve given them what they want?