

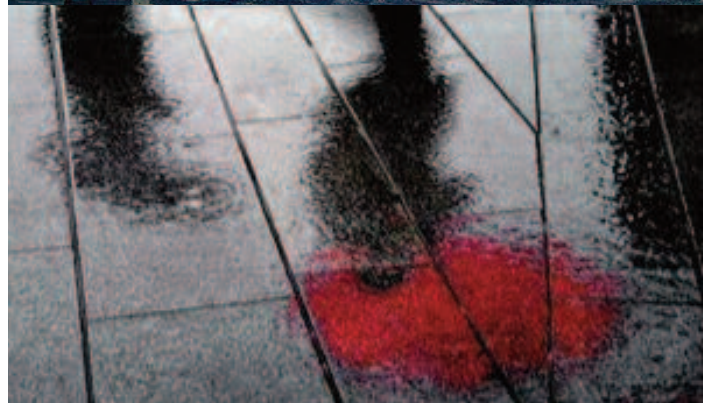
In 1988 the Alcohol Research Group at the University of Edinburgh started a research project looking at the risk of HIV transmission in the sex industry in Edinburgh. A group of male and female, current and former sex workers were recruited to the research team and trained as interviewers. They interviewed sex workers and their clients and provided them with condoms, advice and information about safe sex, sexual health and support services. The research showed that there was still some unprotected sex happening in the sex industry and that there was a need for sexual health information, practical support and health care services.

In February 1989 the research team attended an international symposium on HIV and the sex industry held in Edinburgh, where they met a number of researchers and service providers from around the world. It was suggested that the team form a self help organisation to provide support and services to prostitutes in Edinburgh based on the model of CAL-PEP (Californian Prostitutes Education Project – a sister project to COYOTE) in San Francisco.

SCOT-PEP was officially established in the spring of 1989. The outreach services that had been provided through the research project were continued and expanded within the indoor and male sex industry. At the time SCOT-PEP didn't provide services for outdoor female sex workers, because an existing project, the Centenary Project, was already filling that gap.

In December 1989 the National AIDS Trust gave SCOT-PEP £13,000 to help set up a drop-in centre in Edinburgh. A year later the Monument Trust donated £82,000 and CrusAID Scotland raised £11,500 from a benefit attended by Princess Di, which enabled SCOT-PEP to start renovating space for a drop-in centre at 21a Torphichen Street.

The SCOT-PEP city centre premises and drop-in was officially opened on Monday 6 January 1991. It provided a base for the project, which had been operating from the University of Edinburgh and volunteer's homes, and a safe space for those involved in the sex industry. Services that were offered included a medical clinic run by GUM, primary health care, sexual health, family planning, HIV and AIDS care, sexual health supplies, information, advice and referral to other agencies.



In 1993 SCOT-PEP moved to bigger premises at Johnson Terrace, which allowed more room for clinics, and in 1995 were awarded a Health Board contract from Lothian NHS. This led to a second drop-in being opened in Leith at the Shore, with a medical clinic run by GUM, needle exchange, sexual health supplies, information, advice and referrals to other agencies.

1996 saw the creation of a Young Persons worker and eviction from the Leith drop-in, on the grounds that SCOT-PEP was attracting prostitution to the area. The drop-in moved to a mobile unit parked in Dock Street.

1997 and 1998 saw a lot of upheaval, as the city centre drop-in and the mobile unit closed as SCOT-PEP moved into much bigger premises in Coburg Street where drop-in services were offered 5 nights a week. Funding streamed in over the next four years, with the creation of counseling, 'New Futures', volunteer development and drugs worker posts.

On December 1st 2001 - World AIDS Day – the Edinburgh tolerance zone for street prostitution came to an end. The Coburg Street premises, right in the heart of the old zone, were no longer easily accessible to street based sex workers.

In 2002 SCOT-PEP moved again, to Newhaven Road. These premises were smaller and didn't have any private clinic space, so medical services were provided briefly by GUM in Allander House, but were suspended a year later due to staff shortages. SCOT-PEP began running a mobile project in Leith 4 nights a week with NHS Lothian funding for a mobile unit and car. Outreach to indoor workers continued at 4 days a week.

In 2004 the funding pots began to dry up. The Young Persons project was the first to go, with outreach (already cut down to 3 days and nights a week in 2003) reduced to 2 days and 2 nights a week (to indoors and street workers).

After several years of frozen funding – which ate into the money left to provide services as staff costs rose with the cost of living – NHS Lothian cut SCOT-PEP's funding by two thirds in November 2009. SCOT-PEP turned them down, unwilling to see services deteriorate any further.

