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**Materials from: Shift, a program of AIDS Calgary / Calgary Cares Centre  
~ Media Kit ~**

This document was assembled in June, 2011.

For more information on Shift, read the Case Study in CATIE's Programming Connection at  
<http://www2.catie.ca/en/pc/case-studies>.

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**Documents sur : Shift, un programme de : AIDS Calgary / Calgary Cares Centre  
~ Un dossier de presse ~**

Ce document a été assemblé avec juin 2011.

Pour plus de renseignements sur Shift, veuillez lire l'étude de cas dans Connectons nos programmes de CATIE à : <http://www2.catie.ca/fr/cnp/etudes-cas>

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### **Why a media kit?**

Shift works to raise awareness of the issues surrounding sex work in Calgary. We are passionate advocates for sex workers. Part of our mission statement is to inform and educate the public, including all media sources.

We hope this media kit serves as an education tool for all media employees. The Shift program can provide additional information and is available as a resource for the media when reporting on sex work issues.

As a media source you have an engaged, educated and socially aware audience. Our hope is that media sources like yours set an example for the community and help us create a compassionate society where all people are treated with dignity and respect.

### **What is the Shift Program?**

In July 2007, AIDS Calgary officially launched the Shift program. Utilizing a harm reduction and human rights based approach Shift works with male, female and transgendered adults involved in the sex trade. Shift works with individuals who have exited or who are currently working in the areas of; escorting, exotic dance clubs, massage parlors, phone/chat line, or in street level sex trade. The services that Shift offers include; outreach, advocacy, case management, counseling, provision of safer sex supplies, information, legal support, bad date sheets, and a monthly peer support group for exited sex trade workers.

### **The Impact of the Shift Program**

Since its inception, Shift has provided street level outreach, counseling and case management services to sex workers in Calgary. The Shift program has assisted sex workers with issues such as: housing, substance use, health, legal concerns, family issues and many more. The Shift program participates in the Calgary Network on Prostitution (CNOP). CNOP is a coalition that provides a community based response to sex work in Calgary. We have facilitated community based workshops on sex work, and launched a peer program for exited sex workers.

**For more information on this media kit please contact:  
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## History of the Sex Trade in Canada

Often referred to as the oldest profession in the world, sex work has occurred through out history. Over time the venue for and the laws regarding sex work have changed. Historically the sex trade commonly occurred within brothels.

From 1890 onwards, brothels decreased in Canada due to a change in laws. This decrease caused a huge increase in highly visible street level sex work. Street level sex workers are often working in dangerous and vulnerable situations, and commonly face violence and aggression (Canadian Encyclopedia, 2008). The homicide report by Statistics Canada states that sex trade is the most deadly occupation in Canada. In 2005, 9 sex trade workers were killed. Statistics Canada reports that 171 women have been killed between the years of 1991 and 2004. They also say that these numbers are in reality much higher due to the number of missing women in our country (Statistics Canada, 2005).

Prostitution itself has never been illegal in Canada; however, several activities associated with sex work are illegal. The first laws prior to 1867 involved vagrancy. Workers were charged based on “street walking” and disturbing the peace. In 1892, the vagrancy provisions outlawing street walking and bawdy houses were incorporated along with additional offenses directed at bawdy house operators and procurers of women "for unlawful carnal connection." In the 1970's, amendments were made to include male sex trade workers into the legal code. In the 1980's the code was amended to include section 213, 213(2), 210, 211, 212, and procuring offences. The laws include communicating for the purpose or communicating in “public”, keeping a “common bawdy house”, transporting to a bawdy house, living of the income earned through sex work or encouraging an individual to become a sex worker (Canadian Encyclopedia, 2008).

Currently sex work occurs in a variety of venues ranging from escort agencies, internet chats, adult movies, massage parlors, exotic dance clubs, independent escorts, and street level sex work. It is estimated that while street level sex trade is highly visible it comprises only 10% of the sex trade industry (History of Sex Trade, 2007).

## Language and the Media

The tremendous stigma attached to words like prostitute, hooker, and whore negatively impact the lives of sex workers and their families. Labels like hooker or whore dehumanize and isolate sex workers. Labels cause one to associate the individual's whole existence with sex work.

Prostitution has historically evoked moral outrage, and has been associated with deviance, illicit behavior, and criminality. The judgment riddled title “prostitute” recognizes the person **only** as a prostitute; it fails to encompass the person as a human being entitled to basic human rights, dignity, and respect. Headlines and news broadcasts about a “dead hooker” do



not recognize that this person may have been a mother, sister, friend, brother, and a human being. There are complex reasons for why individuals become involved in sex work and recognizing the diversity of these individuals is important to break stereotypes and build compassion.

Media should be referring to people involved in sex work as sex workers. This is the term that sex workers have identified as the appropriate label. The term sex work creates a separation between what the person does, and who the person is. It allows sex workers to define themselves and puts their rights to do so back in their own hands. The term sex worker removes social stigma and recognizes that, for the individual, the exchange of sexual services for goods is work and it does not make up the individuals entire identity. Shifting the language used in media is more than political correctness it is socially responsible and creates a safer society for sex workers.

### **Responsibility of the Media**

The media assists to inform society and shape public perception. The main goal of the media is to provide an unbiased account of events. Sex workers are already a marginalized population in society. The media has the power to further isolate sex workers with language. When a headline reads “Dead Hooker” or “Prostitute Slain”, the negative connotations focus only on the “hooker”, it fails to recognize the person who lost their life. The terminology used by media perpetuates stereotypes, and may give the public the perception that disregard for human life is acceptable. The negative attachments to hooker, whore, or prostitute can cause the public to put the lives of sex workers low on the social hierarchy. These types of stories do not highlight the diversity and does not recognize that sex workers are individuals with families and stories beyond their involvement in sex work.

According to the society of Professional Journalists, journalists have an ethical responsibility to “Avoid stereotyping by race, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance, or social status” (Society of Professional Journalists, 2008). This supports the idea that media has a responsibility to accurately portray sex workers in articles and headlines, referring to sex workers by proper titles, and writing content that accurately illustrates the uniqueness of each person and situation.

One-sided articles that focus on “cleaning neighborhoods” and “removing prostitution” fails to embrace the complex social issues around sex work. The Society of Professional Journalist also promotes the value of “support(*ing*) open views, even views which they find repugnant”. The society also believes that journalists should “Tell the story of the diversity and magnitude of the human experience boldly, even when it is unpopular to do so” and to “Give voice to the voiceless” (Society of Professional Journalists, 2008). The voices of sex workers should be included in media; sex workers should have the right to voice an opinion while maintaining their confidentiality. The issues are rarely simple, and all sides of the story



should be presented to the public in order for community members to make informed decisions.

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