

ATTENTION!
DOWNTOWN EAST AND EASTEND ORGANIZATIONS JOIN TOGETHER TO
RELEASE A STATEMENT ON THE SEXUAL ASSAULT AND CONFINEMENT OF
A SEX WORKER

On Tuesday April 7th, 2015, the media released news that a man in the South Riverdale area was accused of sexually assaulting and confining a woman against her will for five days. ***The Women's Harm Reduction Program*** at South Riverdale Community Health Centre, ***Maggie's Toronto Sex Worker Action Project***, ***Downtown East Women Reclaim the Streets*** and ***Street Health*** share a mutual concern about this act of sexual violence within our community. Firstly we want to express our sympathy to the woman who suffered from this preventable act of gender based sexual violence. Sexual violence against sex workers happens way too often within the downtown east and South Riverdale community. The criminalization of sex work increases the risks of violence by forcing sex workers to work in unsafe environments without being able to put in place safety strategies.

Currently under the new legislation *Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act (PCEPA)* sex workers are working in a system that has proven to continue to put sex workers lives at risk by making it a criminal act to put in place safety precautions. This incident may have been preventable if sex workers were given the opportunity to work in safer environments under a decriminalized system. Decriminalization of trading sex allows sex workers to work with both safety and dignity.

Most recently Attorney General Madeleine Meilleur announced that the new prostitution laws *PCEPA* are found to be constitutional despite the *Canada v. Bedford* ruling that struck down the three previous prostitution related provisions. Concerns have been raised by Premier Kathleen Wynn, 15 Toronto City Councilors and 60 organizations that signed on to a statement created by sex workers and sex worker organizations asking for non-enforcement and decriminalization of sex work at all levels. Currently legislation has more than proven that sex workers lives are NOT a priority. Together we need to continue to advocate for systemic change and continue to build stronger communities to ensure the lives of sex workers become a priority. Violence against sex workers needs to end!

If you are sex worker and would like further support you can contact the following sex worker positive organizations:

South Riverdale Community Health Center-Women's Harm Reduction Program a member driven program that provides services and programs for women who use drugs and or are involved in sex work. If you have been impacted by criminalization, stigma and discrimination and identify as a sex worker or a woman who uses drugs our program is here to offer support. You can contact Women's Harm Reduction Health Promoter at (416) 461-1925 ext. 388

Maggie's Toronto Sex Workers Action Project is an organization that is run by and for local sex workers. Maggie's mission is to assist sex workers in our efforts to work with safety and dignity.

Join us this coming summer once again for **Downtown East Women Reclaim the Streets** – an annual march led by women in the Dundas-Sherbourne neighborhood, highlighting issues facing street involved women. Let us fight to change these unfair laws, and for the kind of society where violence like this does not continue to happen.

For further information about this statement you can contact:

Arlene Jane Pitts
Women's Harm Reduction Program Health Promoter
Tel: (416) 461-1925 ext. 388
apitts@srhc.com