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A DAY IN THE LIFE OF ... A CRIMINAL JUSTICE WORKER

Nicola McCloskey on a typical day with Sacro's "Another Way" service for sex workers

MY SHIFT STARTS at 9pm on a Wednesday evening. As a criminal justice worker with Sacro's Another Way service in Edinburgh, I provide an outreach service for street sex workers, in partnership with NHS Lothian's Harm Reduction Team. We are based in Leith, where women usually are working on the street, and offer a place of safety for women. Women access our van, where we have tea and coffee facilities and can provide emotional support, condoms, needles and other harm reduction equipment. For me, this service is assertive outreach at its best. We are not at someone's door screaming through a letter box. We are based where women are working and make our service accessible, while remaining discrete. We work from 9pm - 12am as many women work late and a typical '9 to 5' service isn't sufficient. We tend to see between one and five women each night. Not bad for a client group known as hidden and hard to reach!

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Unfortunately the reality for our client group is that the risk of assault, rape and robbery is exceptionally high. As a result, we take third party reports for women who experience any kind of abuse and can remote report this intelligence to Police. The scheme is aptly named the 'Ugly Mug' scheme and we provide the information to other sex workers so that they too can recognise any 'dodgy punters'. Women use our outreach service to report any attacks and have trust that their anonymity will be secure. Street workers are typically charged by the Police under the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982, for loitering in a public place for the purposes of prostitution. This does stop some women from directly reporting offences to the Police and thus, it is important that women report via our service so that important intelligence does get through. Our client group continue to remain stigmatised and women report trust issues and challenges accessing services. This is a constant challenge for workers however we find that persistence pays off and women will engage when they are ready.

Thursday morning involves catching up with paperwork and recording events from the evening shift. I ensure that any required follow ups are completed, either by me or by partner services. As the service works closely with the two Prostitute Liaison Officers in Edinburgh Police, I call them to catch up about service delivery and discuss any women who are of concern. I see clients throughout the day in and out of the office. There are a number of barriers to women accessing the service, including control from partners or pimps, trust issues and complex drug and alcohol addictions. If appropriate women can be matched with a volunteer mentor who can provide long term support.



I attend a meeting with staff from Police Scotland, NHS Lothian and other third sector organisations that has a focus on best practice, policy developments and partnership working. This has been particularly important over the recent months after the highly publicised sauna raids in Edinburgh and the removal of the Public Entertainment licenses for massage parlours.

It is particularly important for women to link in with health services, as many present with vast unmet health needs. The rates of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder are extensive and a large number of women I work with have experiences of trauma and abuse in their life. On Thursday afternoon and into the evening I am based at the Spittal Street Women's Clinic, primarily a sexual health clinic for women involved in sex work or using drugs. I meet a number of women at the clinic, either by appointment or drop in. Support tends to focus around addictions, domestic abuse, safety while working and support to exit from prostitution. I work closely with the medical staff to ensure that we share appropriate information regarding individual clients and this holistic approach works extremely well. We have a great team that support one another to offer a 'one stop shop' for female sex workers. There is no 'typical' sex worker however many of the women I work with do have similar needs and we strive to offer a trauma informed service to all.

I thoroughly enjoy my role and feel lucky to be involved in policy and service development, volunteer coordination and most importantly working directly with service users. At the end of the day a cup of tea is always appreciated! Trust me, there is no 'typical working day' for me.

Nicola McCloskey is a criminal justice worker with Another Way, Sacro, Edinburgh.