

05 February 2025

Services available to Women involved in the sex industry

We are collating information on the services available to Women involved in the sex industry across the country. Please could you let us know for your local area:

- 1. Do you commission a specific service provision to support Women involved in the sex Industry?**
- 2. If yes, which organisation provides the service?**
- 3. If not – is that service provided locally by other funding, and who provides it?**
- 4. Is the service monitored through your Male Violence Against Women and Girls workstream?**
- 5. If not, who has oversight?**
- 6. Does the service provide distinct support to Women who want to exit the sex industry?**

The Working Women's Service, as it was previously known in Belfast Health and Social Services Trust (BHSCT) was opened in 1999, specifically for women who operated on street sex work. At that time, Bryson House, a charitable organisation provided the Trust with free accommodation which was city centric, and a discrete location where the women felt safe to attend. The profile of the service user ranged from high end professionals to women and men from a range of other backgrounds. Some travelled to Belfast from across the Region to work and vice versa.

The service later extended its reach to other sex workers including those escorting, brothel working and those who would come from UK and Ireland to work. Later the service saw an increase in clients who identified as transgender.

Services offered to all who attended, included a full sexual health screen including Blood Bourne Virus screening, Immunisation, HEP b vaccines and seasonal flu vaccines, psychosexual therapy, health education, adult safeguarding and defence sense personal safety. A key part of the service was sign posting if required to other services.

The change in how sex work was delivered saw a rapid decline in street sex work and as a result those attending Bryson House clinic all but disappeared over a number of years. Reasons for this included:-

- The use of Social media – meet ups now organised via web based platforms and text messages
- Lord Morrows Bill – The threat to those paying /buying sex, this drove workers and their clients to operate below the radar



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- An increase in offers to work from Brothels, Escort services and some clients using their own premises/homes.
- Covid -19 pandemic
- Closure and relocation of Bryson House to a location not acceptable for the service.
- The Introduction of other testing options SH24.

While a dedicated Working Women service no longer operates there is still the opportunity for clients to access all appropriate screening from the Belfast Inclusion Health Service (BIHS). It is worth noting that there is a new and emerging sex work population of young, homeless females and males who have drug addictions, specifically injecting drugs and are sex working to afford the drug or to be able to obtain drugs for personal use or to sell on. BIHS offers BBV screening, vaccination, sexual health screening, support and pathway referrals to access specialist services as required.