

# Transitioning programs for sex workers: Evidence review report

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# 1 Executive summary

While government funded transitioning programs have been offered in some of the states and territories in Australia since the early 2000s, there is little publicly available information about these programs and evidence of best practice. This report aims to fill a gap in literature on transitioning programs in Australia as part of an evidence review of transitioning programs, nationally and internationally.

The report is based on an evidence review of transitioning programs and stakeholder interviews with organisations providing transitioning services for sex workers across Australia and New Zealand. In light of recent local and state government funding in this area, the research was conducted by RMIT University with the aim of building the evidence base and informing the development of transitioning programs across Australia and the region.<sup>1</sup> Despite this state and local government funding, the vast majority of program development and activities undertaken regarding transitioning for sex workers in Australia are yet to be documented. In order to document practice in this area consultative interviews were undertaken with a number of key stakeholders and this was complemented by desk-based research on transitioning programs. The results of the stakeholder consultations are reported in the Technical and Background Paper that accompanies this report (Sandy, Meenagh, & Nesladicola, 2019). This evidence review report explores existing program models and frameworks in some depth to inform the development of an evidence-based framework for a transitioning program. The case studies described in this report provide evidence of promising practice and other key themes from the stakeholder interviews and evidence review include the need to develop a sex worker-centred methodology; incorporate a 'career development' approach and develop a mix of group and individual support services as well as holistic service provision. The case studies also present innovative approaches to program delivery ranging from single service provider models to delivery incorporating consortium-style approaches and other models designed to address regional coverage including multiple providers working across a country. The case studies also confirm that well-designed programs aim to encourage local ownership and adopt a community empowerment approach if they are to be successfully implemented with sex workers.

The key recommendations of this report are clustered around the idea of breaking down power relations shaping research and programming with sex workers in the area of transitioning. Briefly, the recommendations begin by identifying what a transitioning service can do, and make suggestions for the best way in which these services can be delivered. They also make recommendations for how a transitioning program can better reflect sex workers needs and priorities, including carrying out a needs assessment, maintaining regular and ongoing consultation with sex workers, developing the program from bottom-up and with the direct involvement of sex workers at all stages. Recommendations are made in terms of staffing profiles, providing peer support and suggestions are made for the development of a program framework. The recommendations also highlight how transitioning programs may be uniquely positioned to collaborate with government and other services, develop community-awareness campaigns targeting Victorian workplaces and educational institutions and provide de-stigmatisation training with more mainstream service providers.

A well-designed transitioning program needs to understand the complexity of transitioning and create supportive environments that facilitate access to non-stigmatising services. This includes expanding life choices and a person's right to determine whether they want to remain in or leave sex work.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the 2017-18 state budget provided an additional \$4 million over four years to Resourcing Health and Education in the Sex Industry (RhED) for the Pathways program (Parliament of Victoria, 2017). In the same financial year Project Respect also received \$112,500 in state government funding from the Department of Treasury and Finance under the Community Support Fund to develop the 'Breaking Barriers: Enhancing Employment Pathways' program (State of Victoria, 2018). In 2018, the City of Port Phillip provided funding to St Kilda Gatehouse for the Greeves St. project, which is a program assisting street-based sex workers to leave sex work (City of Port Phillip, n.d.)

## 2 Introduction

This paper reports on an evidence review of transitioning programs conducted by RMIT University which sets out to explore promising practice in transitioning programs for sex workers. The report aims to fill a gap in the literature as there has been little Australian and Victorian-based research since work undertaken by the Prostitution Control Act Ministerial Advisory Committee as part of their review of the *Prostitution Control Act (1994)* in 2007 (CAV, 2007).<sup>2</sup> In making their recommendations and determining the most appropriate transitioning services for sex workers, the Ministerial Advisory Committee carried out a review of the national and international literature that focused on people moving into and out of sex work and conducted interviews with organisations providing services to sex workers in Victoria and elsewhere in Australia (CAV, 2007, pp. 11-19).<sup>3</sup> The Ministerial Advisory Committee recommended a transitioning program be developed for Victorian sex workers, and that this program be based on a case management approach designed to building linkages and non-judgemental referral pathways for sex workers to other allied services. In addition, the Committee recommend emergency or brokerage funding as part of the program (CAV, 2007). In 2008, Project Respect commenced the Pathways project while the Greeves St. project at St Kilda Gatehouse also provided support for sex workers wanting to leave sex work (St Kilda Gatehouse, 2008; Project Respect, 2008). In addition, a pilot transitioning program was implemented by RhED in February 2010 and subsequently made a permanent program within the service (RhED & Resolve Community Consulting, 2012; RhED 2013). Given that transitioning programs have been running in the state for the past ten years, coupled with the renewed interest in this program area demonstrated by the substantial increase in government funding, it was considered important to take stock of work to date and document the available evidence on transitioning programs.

The aim of the review is to inform the development of transitioning programs by providing a summary of published scholarly and grey literature with a focus on sex workers needs in transitioning. The review is not a meta-analysis or systematic review but rather a summary of published scholarly and other resources. The report presents an overview of key findings, a framework for promising practices in transitioning programs and identifies gaps in programs and services.

### 2.1.1 Purpose and Aims

The design of the review was four-fold:

1. summarise research evidence for transitioning programs;
2. compile and evaluate data on the effectiveness of transitioning programs, sex workers access to these programs and the possible impact of different legislative contexts;
3. provide an overview of 'best' and 'promising' practices in transitioning programs and develop an evaluation tool to measure this; and
4. identify gaps in resources and recommend promising approaches to inform future directions in the development of the program, materials and resources.

The evidence review was carried out with a focus on the following key issues:

- legislative contexts;
- engagement methods and approaches in transitioning services for sex workers;
- overseas approaches to transitioning programs; and
- querying 'exiting' through an exploration of existing paradigms of understanding transitioning and the current evidence.

<sup>2</sup> The sex work discourse is a comparatively modern one, and reflective of the discursive shift from moral to economic, Victoria's *Prostitution Control Act (1994)* was renamed the *Sex Work Act (1994)* in 2010. In this report when historical sex work legislation is discussed, the terms and legislation titles specific to the times being referred to are used. This prevents projecting backwards a subject position that may not have been present among legislators in the early 1990s.

<sup>3</sup> The organisations consulted included: RhED, Project Respect, Salvation Army Crisis Contact Service, Living Room Health Service, St Kilda Legal Service, Gatehouse, Southern Edge Training and Corrections Victoria's Transitional Services (CAV, 2007, pp. 11-12).

The aims of the evidence review was to:

1. identify existing national and international transitioning programs and empirical and conceptual evidence for best and promising practice;
2. establish a framework and develop an evaluation tool or matrix on promising practice in transitioning programs; and
3. develop evaluation criteria to determine evidence of promising and best practice.

To meet these requirements, the report provides a summary of findings from the scholarly literature (see Appendix 1 for details on the literature review framework). The report examines existing paradigms of understanding transitioning and 'exiting' models in Section 4. Section 5 distils key transitioning programs and provides an evaluation of promising practices in transitioning programs. Ideally, the Evidence Review Report should be read alongside the accompanying Technical and Background Paper (Sandy, Meenagh, & Nes-ladicola, 2019). This is because the Technical and Background Paper provides an in-depth exploration of the issues surrounding language and terminology and attempts to set out a conceptual framework for establishing best and promising practice in transitioning programs based on the literature and consultations with stakeholders. It also contains an evaluation tool for monitoring and evaluating promising practice in service provision.

## 2.2 Structure of the Report

The remainder of this report is structured as follows. First, the following section provides additional context with a discussion of key definitions and terminology, focusing on the distinctions between 'exiting' and 'transitioning' as well as 'best' and 'promising' practices (Section 3). Section 4 then provides a summary of the findings from scholarly literature and grey literature, and also presents context (and evidence) on which the discussion of promising practices is based. Although parts of section 4 are somewhat dense this is necessary as it outlines theoretical concepts and models upon which a transitioning program could be based. A key finding of the work undertaken on establishing promising practices is that the program be theory-based (i.e. informed by a theory of change), so this part of the report provides rich detail on the major theories of change current transitioning programs are based on. Section 5 reports on the key themes of promising practice as well as some illustrative case studies drawn from the research. Section 6 presents suggested future directions and recommendations to inform ongoing work in transitioning or the development of new programs. Finally, Section 7 provides a summary and conclusion of the report.

## 3 Terminology: Sex work, transitioning and promising practices

There are a number of key terms used throughout this report and so it is useful to briefly define and discuss these here. In particular, it is important to begin with: a shared definition of sex work; an understanding of the controversy surrounding the term 'exiting' and what transitioning means; and an explanation of the key differences between the terms 'best', 'promising' and 'emerging' practice.

### 3.1 Sex work

In this report, the terms sex work and prostitution are not used interchangeably. The report views sex work as work and recognises people engaged in monetised sexual exchanges as sex workers. Where studies cited in the report have used problematic language it has been retained in the report. This is because it helps to show that the literature under discussion may not necessarily represent the voices and views of all sex workers.

Key terminology is discussed in more depth in the Technical and Background Paper (Sandy, Meenagh, & Nes-ladicola, 2019). In order to avoid duplication, sex work refers to the provision of sexual services for payment (cash or in kind), with the practice involving more formal commercial exchanges also known as 'direct' services (e.g. street, brothel, massage, and escort work), and 'non-direct' services (e.g. erotic dancing, strip shows, web camming and phone sex) (Sanders, O'Neill, & Pitcher, 2009). Sex workers include female, male, trans and gender diverse adults and young people who receive money or goods in exchange for sexual services (UNAIDS, 2012).

Sex work takes place in a variety of locations, ranging from brothels or massage parlours and relaxation centres (or similar dedicated establishments) to gentlemen's clubs, strip clubs, hotels, private homes, bars, restaurants, parks and the streets, and it may be recognisable or hidden. It is important to recognise the many different and varied forms of sex work in Victoria, and across Australia, because this may shape what buying and selling sex means.<sup>4</sup>

### 3.2 'Exiting'

In some of the transitioning literature, sex work is framed as dangerous and a harmful activity that people are trapped in, escaping or have survived. Where sex work is framed as a harmful or dangerous activity, there is an assumption that sex workers will want to leave the industry because engaging in sex work is seen as traumatising. While this may be the case for some people engaging in sex work, it is not a universal experience shared by all sex workers. These assumptions have led to some very narrow understandings of transitioning (chiefly as 'exiting'). The term itself, 'exit' positions sex work as something that needs to be escaped, and as discussed in the Technical and Background Paper, it has been identified as offensive and disrespectful (Sandy, Meenagh, & Nes-ladicola, 2019, see also Bowen, 2015). In this report the term 'transitioning' is used to encourage the view of sex work as work and understanding a person's engagement in sex work as part of the trajectory of their working lives (Law, 2013). It also promotes the idea of transitioning as a non-linear process and sex work as something that a person does not have to be 'in' or 'out' of (Bowen, 2013). In the report transitioning is used to refer to transitioning into, out of or within the industry, or starting sex work, movement and mobility in sex work and leaving sex work.

### 3.3 What is promising practice?

**Best practice** is an intervention, method or technique that has been proven effective through rigorous scientific research (ideally conducted by independent researchers) and has been replicated elsewhere (e.g. across several cases or examples) (Canadian Homelessness Research Network (CHRN), 2013). It is an intervention, program, service, strategy or policy that, through multiple implementations, has repeatedly demonstrated a positive impact on the outcomes and objectives of the intervention and given the evidence, it is seen as the most suitable one for a particular situation or context (Fazal et al., 2017).

**Promising practice** is an intervention, program, service, strategy or policy that shows potential (e.g. promise) for developing into best practice (Fazal et al., 2017). There is some evidence (needs to be of a suitable quality) to demonstrate the practice is effective at achieving a specific aim or outcome that is consistent with program objectives (CHRN, 2013). While promising practices demonstrate effectiveness through research (and the research is sound), there may not be enough evidence for it to be considered best practice or it may be that the practice is in the earlier stages of implementation (Fazal et al., 2017).

**Emerging practice** refers to interventions that are innovative and new and hold promise based on some level of evidence of effectiveness; however, this may not be research-based or sufficient enough to be considered promising or best practice (CHRN, 2013). This may be because the intervention is new and there has not been enough time to conduct research.

These definitions are essential in guiding the analysis undertaken in this report and the Technical and Background Paper because many programs may make claims to promising or best practice, but there is a lot of variation in the quality and rigour of research and evidence used to back such claims. As these definitions indicate, the determining factor for making a claim of best or promising practice is evidence. This evidence can be in the form of systematic reviews (meta-analyses and meta-syntheses) in addition to randomised control trials, often considered 'gold star' but having some ethical drawbacks, and quasi-experimental studies (CHRN, 2013; Fazal et al., 2017). As this is an emerging area of research and program work, the use of summative literature reviews and case studies containing evidence of effectiveness that provide detailed information on programs can also

<sup>4</sup> For more on the hierarchal structuring of the Victorian sex industry and discussion of the significant differences surrounding the ways in which sex work is organised and practised see the accompanying Technical and Background Paper (Sandy, Meenagh, & Nes-ladicola, 2019).



be a way to determine emerging and promising practice (CHRN, 2013; Powell & Sandy, 2015). The idea behind the use of case studies in the report was to determine effectiveness. This is because, as CHRN (2013, p. 7) argue, the use of case studies can also assist in the dissemination and adaptation of practices that work. For emerging practices, evidence can be captured in the form of program descriptions or reports that can help in identifying potential promising practices, and this report provides this information where possible in order to inform understandings of promising and emerging practices in transitioning programs.

However, Mayhew and Mossman (2007, p. 30) highlight that it is quite difficult to establish 'best practice' as opposed to 'what works'. In order to address this criticism, the report clearly defines the terms 'best practice', 'promising practice' and 'emerging practice', and the research developed evaluation criteria used to determine best, promising and emerging practice (see Appendix 1 for the evaluation criteria). Another factor Mayhew and Mossman identify as making this difficult is the lack of trustful information, and one of the ways in which this issue can be addressed is through the inclusion of sex workers in program evaluations. They go on to note that the issue of evidence and program evaluation is also complicated by the fact that often there is a lack of baseline measures from which to see what the status quo would have been without the intervention or program. However, this criticism seems to imply that the overall aim of the program would be to increase the number of people leaving sex work rather than providing support that meets best practice for people wanting to leave the industry. Other criticisms of best practice raised by Mayhew and Mossman (2007, p. 27) include the lack of a control group and limited knowledge about whether leaving sex work is the result of natural processes or extraneous events. High mobility in the sector may compound these issues along with the desire of some workers to distance themselves from sex work when they leave, and finally, as discussed in this report, is the 'exit' a time-out from work, leaving sex work altogether or part of a dual-life career? All of these factors also impact upon any attempt to try and formulate, design and measure best and/or promising practice in transitioning programs, and this then suggests not only the need to be highly innovative in design but also drawing from allied and related fields wherever and whenever it is feasible to do so.

## 4 Understanding transitioning

This section of the report discusses a small body of research that explores how sex workers understand and view transitioning from the perspective of the labour market and working conditions. It is important to understand transitioning from a sex worker's perspective because the small body of research presents some very different views to transitioning compared with the perspectives of people outside of the industry. It may also help people understand the role of transitioning programs for sex workers themselves and the different value they may place on transitioning programs as well as the services workers may draw most benefit from. This section also discusses some of the reasons for people leaving the sex industry, reasons that can be useful in helping to design appropriate services and supports. It presents a model for understanding categories of sex work that could also be useful in the design of a transitioning program. After a review of the evidence, the report contends moving away from the dominant public health focus on working type or sector to understanding the method of entry and motivations for working in the industry, which may have some bearing on a worker's attempt to transition (either into, out of or within the industry).

Although there is little research with sex workers that focuses on how they engage with the concept of transitioning, four broad categories around transitioning, retiring and leaving sex work are developed in this section to help inform overall program design and development. The section concludes with an in-depth exploration of 'exiting' ideologies and models, and highlights how transitioning models are influenced by the underlying ideologies that shape and frame the program. The examination of 'exiting' models is a detailed one because this is the bedrock for establishing promising and/or best practice: the practice is informed by theory. Thus, this section of the report provides important theoretical groundwork not only for understanding transitioning and motivations for leaving and staying in sex work, but also the range of program frameworks that can be drawn upon in program design and development. It is important to establish a program framework as this not only shapes how services are delivered but is crucial in meeting promising practice and developing an evidence-based program.

## 4.1 Transitioning: the view of sex workers

The Technical and Background Paper explores the issue of how sex workers themselves view the term 'exiting' through interviews with peer workers (Sandy, Meenagh, & Nes-ladicola, 2019). To briefly summarise these findings, sex workers viewed the term 'exiting' as offensive and based on understandings of sex work held by people external to the industry that workers want to stop sex work and, as they are trapped in the industry, need help to escape. Many respondents saw 'exiting' as part of the rescue industry and anti-sex work approaches that do not view sex work as work and ultimately reinforced and re-entrenched stigma and discrimination. Other participants spoke about the sense of finality associated with the word 'exiting' and how this failed to capture sex workers' experiences of transitioning. While most sex worker organisations reported providing some kind of informal services and support, which may indicate the need for transitioning services, participants were clear that this was because of the stigma and discrimination sex workers face outside of the sex industry rather than workers lacking skills. 'Exiting' was seen as part of the stigmatising language surrounding sex work and sex workers and social practices that treat sex workers as a class apart. In this sense, exiting was seen as counterintuitive to understanding sex work as work and perpetuated the myths and norms surrounding sex work and sex workers (for more see Sandy, Meenagh, & Nes-ladicola, 2019). Understanding transitioning from the perspective of sex workers, what becomes important is the need to work with sex workers to develop a definition of transitioning based on the idea of sexual labour and sex worker agency. In continuing to build an evidence base on sex worker perspectives of transitioning, this section of the report discusses the results of a small body of research that explores how sex workers view 'exiting' from the perspective of the labour market and working conditions in the sector (Bowen, 2013, 2015; Ham & Gilmour, 2016; Law, 2011, 2013; Pickering, Maher, & Gerard, 2009; Sanders, 2007).

A key factor to consider when discussing the issue of transitioning from a sex worker's perspective is that a significant proportion of sex workers view sex work as temporary work and, for many workers mobility or movement in, out and within sex work is seen as part of the work and expected employment trajectories (Ham & Gilmour, 2016). A large body of national and international research with sex workers has documented that most sex workers do not view sex work as something they will do forever: some workers express the intention to engage in sex work for a relatively short period of time or to meet certain goals (Brennan, 2014; Chapkis, 1997; Day, 2007; Groves et al., 2008; Ham & Gilmour, 2016; Law, 2000; Pickering, Maher, & Gerard, 2009; Sanders, 2005; Sandy, 2014). As Ham and Gilmour highlight in their research with women sex workers in Melbourne and Vancouver, for workers that planned a long-term career in the industry many 'employed a range of strategies including dual careers, contingency plans (e.g. further education, substantial savings) and an expected end date (e.g. at age 50)' (2016, p. 5). Sex workers' own personal timelines in the industry can and do differ, and some of the factors influencing this include motivations for work, personal and financial goals and intended end dates.

In Ham and Gilmour's study, women entered sex work in order to finance specific goals, fund specific purchases, be able to study or when children were young. Similar to Ham and Gilmour, Pickering, Maher and Gerard's research with women working in Victorian brothels noted financial benefits, flexibility and the ready availability of work and the temporary nature of work as key reasons for women doing sex work (see also Groves et al., 2008). Ham and Gilmour (2016, p. 5), however, go on to observe that, because of the perceived advantages of sex work, workers do need to prepare themselves for living without secure well-paid work (i.e. the work being precarious), and some of the women in their study spoke about the need to prepare themselves for potential exclusion from sex work. As they discuss, some worker narratives carried the idea that women needed to ensure they were in a 'position to leave the industry before it left you' as many were aware how the work values 'particular bodies, femininities or masculinities, and services' (Ham & Gilmour, 2016, p. 5-6). Some of the factors that Ham and Gilmour (2016, p. 6) identify as impacting on career longevity and opportunities include age, gender, class and ethnicity. However, none of the participants in Law's (2013) research with women in Toronto and Montreal stopped sex work because they felt they were too old to stay in sex work. One woman in Law's study, Sara, did not start working as an escort until she was thirty-five and was still doing sex work at the age of fifty-two (Law, 2013, p. 103).



These Melbourne-based studies with sex workers raise several important points relevant to transitioning. This includes some self-perceptions about the unsustainability of sex work. The ways in which sex workers manage this working context are reflected in employment patterns and high levels of worker mobility, including in, out and within the industry. For example, the most significant form of worker mobility documented by Pickering, Maher and Gerard was worker movement in and out of the Victorian industry. Only seven out of fifty-five workers interviewed as part of their research had never ceased sex work for some period (Pickering, Maher, & Gerard, 2009, p. 9). For most participants in their study, sex work was seen as a means to supplement other forms of employment and life activities (Pickering, Maher, & Gerard, 2009, p. 9). Similar to Ham and Gilmour (2016, p. 6-8), they also noted that a group of workers had dual careers in that sex work supplemented or supported other careers and workers moved into and out of the industry on that basis (Pickering, Maher, & Gerard, 2009, p. 8).

Based on this evidence, Ham and Gilmour (2016) suggest that not only were short-term goal-oriented approaches the norm for many in the industry, but almost all sex workers had some kind of 'exit plan' or strategy. These 'exit plans' shaped women's sex work practices. To explain this, in their research, a sex worker's exit plan influenced how they approached sex work and their work practices. For example, Lily, a Melbourne-based Asian independent escort, explained this as:

If you are [in it] for the money, you have to have very clear goals. You have to come up with a specific number of what you want to make. And from that number you can deduct how many bookings you would have to make. And how much time you can spare to be involved in it. You have to make the choice whether you do it on the side and it takes a little bit longer, or you actually just throw yourself in full-time and try to make as much money as you can in as short amount of time as you can. (Ham & Gilmour, 2016, p. 7)

As Ham and Gilmour highlight, sex worker experiences like Lily's differ from dominant 'exiting' narratives, and Lily's reflections show how workers can and do use retirement plans to strengthen work practices and success in sex work, regardless of whether they stay in or leave the industry (2016, p. 8).

The research with sex workers paints a very different picture about how sex workers approach transitions into, out of and within sex work and as Ham and Gilmour argue, the challenge this poses to the development of a transitioning program is the need to:

reconcile the mobility that characterises sex work and the diversity of sex workers' motivations with a dominant exiting narrative in which an encompassing industry ensnares vulnerable women who require assistance in order to escape. Furthermore, the temporariness of the work for many people, alongside the considerable planning evident among [sex workers in Vancouver and Melbourne] and their legitimate concerns around de-skilling, all need to be considered in any exit programming. (Ham & Gilmour, 2016, p. 13)

As they suggest, transitioning programs that aim to teach workers how to leave the industry may be of limited value, and not actually reflective of how sex workers themselves understand and envision transitioning (Ham & Gilmour, 2016, p. 13).

## 4.2 Transitioning: Reasons for leaving sex work

There is a substantial body of literature that explores the reasons for entering into sex work (see, for example, Barry, 1995; Bishop & Robinson, 1998; Brennan, 2014; Brown, 2000; Busza, 2004; Campbell, 2003; Chapkis, 1997; Day, 2007; Derks, 2008; Doezema, 2010; Farley, 2007; Ford & Lyons, 2011; Kempadoo, 1999; Kulick, 1998; Lim & ILO, 1998; Murray, 2001; Norma & Tankard-Reist, 2016; Parreñas, 2011; Sanders, 2005; Sandy, 2014; Wardlow, 2006; Wojciki, 2002). While not all research frames motivations for sex work within the prism of sex work as a social problem or a form of violence against women, as Mayhew and Mossman (2007) suggest, there is a large evidence base that argues people (predominately women) enter sex work because of damaged or inadequate social backgrounds (see, for example, Barry, 1995; Bindel et al., 2012; Brown, 2000; Farley, 2007; Månsson & Hedin, 1999; Norma & Tankard-Reist, 2016; Oselin, 2010). Given this perspective, there is often an assumption that sex workers want to leave the industry because

engaging in sex work is viewed as harmful and dangerous behaviour that causes trauma to the individual. For example, Williamson and Folaron state that for street-based sex workers: 'it is the sum total of daily hassles, acute traumas, and chronic conditions that precipitate a woman's decision to exit prostitution' (2003, p. 283). As Law argues, these studies tend to view 'exiting as trauma recovery' and as a result some of the studies do not consider sex work to be a form of labour (2013, p. 105, see for example, Hedin & Månsson, 2004; Månsson & Hedin 1999; Oselin, 2010; Williamson & Folaron, 2003). While some people engaged in sex work may experience sex work as traumatic, and for these workers leaving sex work may be akin to trauma recovery, this may not be the case for all sex workers. Therefore, it would be erroneous to design a transitioning program from a singular trauma recovery perspective.

Transitioning-specific studies have identified some of the reasons for women wanting to leave sex work.<sup>5</sup> For example, in their research with female street-based sex workers in the US, Dalla (2006) explored motivations for leaving sex work which included: relationship factors (e.g. regaining custody of children); witnessing and experiencing excessive violence; moral reasons/spirituality (e.g. 'getting right with God'); cumulative burdens (e.g. 'hitting rock bottom'); financial factors (e.g. no longer making enough money); and incarceration. Oselin (2010) found similar motivations for women leaving street-based sex work in the US, but added fatigue from working on the streets, becoming sober, other relationship factors (e.g. new romantic partner or re-establishing connections with family and/or friends) and lack of sexual interest in men (e.g. conflicting sexual orientation, lack of sexual pleasure) as factors for leaving sex work.

Oselin, however, argues that it is not the presence of these factors alone that facilitates transitions as often the goal of leaving sex work is accompanied by a 'turning point of change' (2010, p. 536). Månsson and Hedin first identified turning points in their 1999 study of street-based sex work in Sweden. Turning points may include traumatic events (e.g. violence) and what are termed 'positive' life events like relationships and children (Månsson & Hedin, 1999; Oselin, 2010). Oselin (2010, p. 536) also identified arrests and jail, hospitalisation, pregnancy and childbirth as turning points, and argued that, after going through a turning point event, women's reasons for leaving often become more salient. Oselin disagreed with Sanders' 2007 study with indoor and outdoor workers in the UK, which found that a worker's individual reasons for leaving sex work and turning points were often connected, and sometimes the same. Although Oselin (2010) provides examples where there is an overlap, the women in Oselin's study tended to see these as two distinct categories, thus showing that while the reasons and turning point events may often be similar, sex workers themselves do not view them as being the same thing – the reasons for leaving and turning point event are seen by the women as two separate, but interconnected things. For example, a woman's reason for leaving sex work may be violence and/or exhaustion and the turning point event could be witnessing or experiencing excessive violence. While these seem similar, women may understand them as separate events, with the turning point event acting as a catalyst. Furthermore, the women in Oselin's study cited reasons for leaving that varied from their turning point event, however, it was experiencing a turning point event that gave prominence to their reasons for leaving. For example, one of the women in Oselin's study, Shondra, stated that her reasons for leaving sex work were religious beliefs and fear of violence; however, what acted as a catalyst for Shondra was being arrested and placed in jail (turning point event). For Tisha, escalating violence and being 'burned out' were the key reasons why she wanted to leave; but, Oselin (2010, p. 537) argues that re-arrest and the possibility of substantial jail time acted as a turning point. However, when commenting on 'burnout', Law (2013, p. 102) pointed out that participants in their study (indoor sex workers in Toronto and Montreal, Canada) insisted that burnout was not unmanageable or specific to sex work. Burnout, rather, was compounded by stigma, with workers describing the 'psychological toll of "a life of secrecy" ... and "terrible shame"' about doing sex work (Law, 2013, p. 102).

In the transitioning literature, Sanders' 2007 research is unique in being one of the first studies to include indoor and outdoor workers, which allowed comparisons between the two groups. Sanders (2007) found some common reasons for leaving sex work shared by all workers, including the fear

<sup>5</sup> The word 'women' is used here because almost all research on transitioning has been carried out with sex working women, and predominately with women working on the streets. There is a small, but growing body of research with off-street workers (see, for example, Bowen, 2015; Ham & Gilmour, 2016; Law, 2013; Sanders, 2007), and Bowen's work included male and genderqueer participants.

of violence and hostility. A common experience for the women in the study was leaving in response to a specific violent attack at work or the general increase in violence and hostility sex workers encountered. Other reasons documented by Sanders included being 'discovered' working by a boyfriend, partner, family member or friend who was unaware the person was working in the industry, while for some workers there was a natural progression out of sex work (Sanders, 2007, p. 81-86). In addition, Bowen's (2015, p. 439) research with indoor workers documented changes in services as another factor. For example, the rising popularity of the 'girlfriend experience' (GFE), which some workers view as unsafe and blurring the line between sex work and personal non-monetised sexual exchanges.

Although Sanders found similar reasons for indoor and outdoor workers wanting to leave the industry, she did note some differences between the two groups and how they discussed and understood the process. For example, while Sanders found that both indoor and outdoor workers left the industry through a process of gradual planning, there was a significant difference in the language used to discuss this. Indoor workers tended to identify as career workers and spoke of retirement plans:

to have a successful exit route you've got to have some other form of income coming in and you've got to have a very realistic approach to how much you need to live on; one of the major factors being the money side of it. (Clara, ex-escort, aged 39 cited in Sanders, 2007, p. 84)

Clara's words resonate with Lily, a Melbourne-based escort mentioned earlier (Ham & Gilmour, 2016). Lily and Clara show how sex workers' transitioning plans and strategies shape their approach to sex work and working practices, and also the role of dual careers in sex work that supplements and supports other careers (see also Bowen, 2015 and Law, 2013).

For street-based sex workers, Sanders (2007, p. 84) notes gradual planning might often start with a methadone program or other holistic interventions designed to address multiple issues (e.g. addiction, abuse, exclusion), re-housing and/or reconciliation with family or children who had been placed in care. The process was more commonly associated with working closely with service providers in an intensive case management approach:

[safe housing is] ... very important if you want to rehabilitate because you can't rehabilitate and live on the streets because its [drugs] all around you. If you take yourself away from the normal places you go to, although it's more isolated there's less temptation because you don't know anybody. And if you have got some kind of support, someone to come and see you fit in your appointments to get your medication and that type of thing you can overcome it. (Zoe, ex-street worker, 25, cited in Sanders, 2007, p. 84)

Transitioning research clearly indicates the need to work with different groups of sex workers in designing and developing appropriate interventions and activities as well as resources and materials. The studies suggest some commonalities across work sectors, but also some significant and notable differences, which suggest the need to consider different modalities. For example, an intensive case management approach might be appropriate for facilitating transitions for a worker like Zoe, but entirely inappropriate for Clara where a community health-based approach using peer learning might be more appropriate. Sanders' findings highlight the point that while both workers may fit into the category of 'gradual planning', their needs are quite different. This lends support and weight to the idea of establishing a program that is individually tailored to meet a worker's specific needs and able to operate on multiple levels and through multiple modalities. As the literature demonstrates, for most sex workers leaving the industry is not a singular event nor is it a linear process and it is one with varying degrees of complexity.

In summary, the vast majority of research on transitioning has been carried out in contexts where sex work is criminalised (e.g. UK, US, Canada and Sweden). In the UK, the government reinforces 'exiting' through compulsory rehabilitation and/or criminalisation (Sanders, 2007). This is also the case in the US, although to a more limited extent, where rehabilitation is not necessarily compulsory but is used as a means of avoiding incarceration and thus has a coercive element (Oselin, 2010). There is a need for research with sex workers working in different legal contexts in order to develop a more nuanced understanding of transitioning that can account for the effects of varied policies and

legislative frameworks. Another important observation from the research is that most studies have been carried out with women working in the sex industry, and street-based sex workers in particular. Likewise, there is a need for research with workers working in different sectors of the industry, and this research needs to include female, migrant, male, trans and gender diverse sex workers as there is little research on sex workers' different perceptions and experiences of transitioning and service needs. This research is both necessary and important because a better understanding of some of the reasons for leaving, maintaining dual careers, upskilling and staying in sex work can help in developing targeted and appropriate interventions. Finally, there is also a gap in the literature on transitioning that focuses on organisations providing services in this area. There is little research about the organisations and agencies providing transitioning services and sex workers experiences with these organisations. More research is needed with workers who have transitioned out of sex work either with or without the aid of organisations, and that can compare transitioning experiences among different sex workers and the role that organisations or other third parties (i.e. family, friends and partners) may play in overcoming some of the barriers workers may face when leaving the industry.

### 4.3 Categories of sex work & transitioning programs

According to Mayhew and Mossman, most of the literature on 'exiting' focuses on the "bottom end" of very marginalised and damaged street workers', and tends to divide sex workers into broad categories, or typologies (2007, p. 14). In the sex work literature (and especially in the field of public health and STI/HIV prevention), this division is often on the basis of work type or sector (e.g. indoor vs. outdoor, brothel vs. private worker and so on). The main idea underlying these typologies is to recognise heterogeneity among sex workers and the need to develop appropriately targeted interventions. However, in some of the transitioning literature, these categories are not based on work type or sector but between modes of entry into the sex industry and reasons for staying. These categories more commonly feature in modern discourse about sex trafficking and abolitionist feminist framings of sex work that began circulating in the 1970s.<sup>6</sup>

In countering this abolitionist feminist framing, a distinction was made between force and choice in modes of entry into sex work. This distinction first began circulating in the late 1980s. The free/forced dichotomy that emerged from these debates was developed by sex worker activists from industrialised Northern countries like the US and Australia as part of their attempts to recognise a distinction between voluntary and forced sex work (Sandy, 2013, pp. 155-159, see also Doezeema, 2010 and Nagel, 1997). This free/forced framework developed by Northern sex workers denounced forced sex work. In the field of HIV prevention and public health approaches to sex work, it very quickly became the dominant model for understanding sex work internationally. It is also a model that has had some influence over conceptualisations of 'exiting'.

In brief, Lim and International Labour Office describe the categories of free personal choice; pressured entry due to economic factors/lack of alternatives; and overt deception, violence and debt bondage/exploitation by third parties (i.e. trafficking). For the purpose of developing transitioning programs, Mayhew and Mossman (2007, pp. 14-16) extended this typology to include four main groups. This includes:

1. **Sex work as a preferred career:** this group includes sex workers who enjoy their work, and as Ouspenski (2014, p. 34) suggests it may include a small percentage of workers who want to retire from sex work.
2. **Sex work as the best occupational option:** this group includes workers for whom sex work offers flexibility and more autonomy over their work and, given the socio-economic context, a good income. As Kootstra (2010, p. 8) highlights for some workers, sex work may be the best option because of limited education levels, but this may also be because of caring or other responsibilities (Mayhew & Mossman, 2007, p. 14; Ouspenski, 2014, p. 34 see also

<sup>6</sup> While this is discussed in some depth in the Technical and Background Paper, abolitionist feminists view sex work as sexual exploitation and argue that it should be abolished. This understanding is based on the idea that sex cannot be sold, and no woman could freely choose or genuinely consent to sex work. Sex work is seen as inherently violent to women and as an institution of male domination. Sex workers are seen as deceived victims of male power and privilege, and all sex work is viewed as forced. For more on this see Sandy, Meenagh and Nes-ladicola (2019).



Sandy, 2014). Ouspenski (2014, p. 34) points out that for workers in this category who may want to transition, interventions need to be more structural in nature, and focus on changing the social and organisational structures acting as barriers and limiting options to transition.

3. **Sex work as a result of limited choice:** this group includes workers for whom sex work is a means of financing their substance dependency and/or people living in poverty and/or homelessness (Mayhew & Mossman, 2007, p. 14, see also Sandy, 2014). Again, Ouspenski (2014, p. 34) suggests this group also needs structural changes to take place in addition to the delivery of holistic, multidisciplinary interventions.

In following with Lim and the International Labour Office's (1998) framework, Mayhew and Mossman (2007) include a fourth category in which **sex work is a result of no choice**. This category primarily refers to trafficking and exploitation. As Ouspenski (2014, p. 34) suggests, in the first instance this group of workers will likely need appropriate legal assistance if they decide to leave the industry. However, they criticise the inclusion of this group in the different categories of sex workers. Given that this group are forced, deceived and/or trafficked, Ouspenski (2014) argues that they should not be referred to as sex workers. This is based on the definition of sex work as the provision of sexual services by consenting adults and young people. For Ouspenski, sex work that is a result of no choice (i.e. trafficking) is not sex work. They argue that including trafficked persons in this typology is erroneous and contributes to the conflation of sex work with trafficking. This conflation has had serious consequences for sex workers world-wide (Brennan, 2014; Dewey, 2008; Frederick, 2005; Munro, 2008; Sandy, 2012; Sanghera, 2005). However, as research with trafficked persons reveals, the issue may not be as clear cut as Ouspenski suggests.

The free/forced dichotomy on which the above categories are based has been extensively critiqued in critical trafficking studies and so this binary, and the somewhat simplistic understanding of sex work on which it is based, may not necessarily be the best lens through which to view and develop these categories (Dewey, 2008; Doezema, 2002; Kempadoo, 2005; Montgomery, 2001; Murray, 2001; Sandy, 2006). While developing new categories is beyond the scope of this work, Sandy's (2014) research with sex workers in Cambodia attempts to move beyond this binary by exploring women's agency in sex work, and within this the agency exhibited by many women who would, by definition, be considered trafficked. Yet, as Sandy (2014) argues, some of the women's life and work experiences fit better within the 'sex work as the best occupational option' and 'sex work as a result of limited choice' categories, rather than 'sex work as a result of no choice'. Additionally, the women in Sandy's (2014) research who would be defined as 'trafficked' under the UN's Trafficking Protocol and international law, did not view themselves as 'victims of trafficking'. They saw themselves as sex workers, and as women who had made the best choice from the limited options available to them. A growing body of research with sex workers has shown that choice and coercion are insufficient in describing the complexity of sex workers' experiences and differing work contexts (see, for example, Aoyama, 2009; Cheng, 2010; Brennan, 2014; Dewey, 2008; Kotiswaran, 2008; Law, 2000; Maher, 2000; Padilla, 2007; Parreñas, 2011; Sandy, 2014; Wardlow, 2006; Wojcicki, 2002). Given the new emphasis that transitioning programs are attracting, nationally and internationally, there is a need to develop more nuanced categories that move beyond the choice/coercion binary and are based on sex workers' lived experiences and the idea of agency.

Although Oupseski (2014) critiques Mayhew and Mossman's framing, as the analyses highlights, the method of entry and motivations for working in the industry might have some influence upon a worker's attempt to transition, and any transitioning program would need to address these groups differently. Clearly, there is a need for more research in this area that focuses on how sex workers themselves engage with the concept of transitioning. This research would aid in the development of more suitable categories to inform program development; however, is beyond the scope of an evidence review. In lieu of this research, the existing typologies have been drawn upon to create four broad categories around transitioning, retiring and leaving sex work:

1. Sex workers who want to retire from sex work
2. Sex workers who want to maintain dual careers
3. Sex workers who want to expand their employment options beyond sex work



4. Sex workers who have complex circumstances (e.g. unstable housing, alcohol and/or drug use, living with a mental illness, physical health constraints, lack of education) that limit their options outside of sex work.

It is important to note that as with any typology, while it may help explain the wide variety of services needed to enable people to exercise agency in transitioning, they are not static and sex workers may move through all of these categories at some stage in their working lives. Despite the limitations, this may be a useful framework for designing transitioning programs that can also be layered with typologies based on work type/sector, because as Sanders (2007), Law (2013) and Bowen's (2015) work shows, there are some clear differences in transitioning experiences between people working in different sectors of the industry.

## 4.4 'Exiting' models: shaping & framing transitioning programs & interventions

It is important to note that the models discussed in this section are influenced by each individual author's views on sex work. The different transitioning models have been developed from an understanding of sex work as a violation of human rights and a form of violence against women on the one hand and as an issue of choice, agency and labour rights on the other. While there are a few different transitioning models, this section provides an overview of the three main models that have informed transitioning programs. This includes Månsson and Hedin's breakaway model, which is based on role-exit theory, and the UK Network of Sex Work Projects (UK NWSP) cycles of change model and Baker, Dalla and Williamson's integration model, both of which are based on Stages of Change theory. The section ends with a discussion of Sanders' typology of transitioning and Bowen's sex-work-no-more, sex-work-maybe and dual-life categories as these typologies can be useful in further informing the development of program frameworks and targeted interventions. However, Sanders and Bowen's work are typologies and are not theories of change or theoretical models upon which a program can be based.

### 4.4.1 Role exit theory & transitioning models

Fuchs Ebaugh's 1988 model of 'role-exit' is arguably one of the most influential models in the development of transitioning programs. Role exit theory may seem a good fit with the programmatic area of 'exiting' or transitioning, but there are some issues with the models that have developed from this theoretical perspective.

Fuchs Ebaugh's work explores the key stages people go through as they leave a role: first doubts; seeking alternatives and weighing these up; turning points and how they function in the role-exit process; and establishing an ex-role identity (Fuchs Ebaugh, 1988, see also Månsson and Hedin, 1999 and Oselin, 2010). Fuchs Ebaugh argues that while some sex workers may go through role-exit in a linear way, this will not be the case for all, as others may return to previous roles, and there is no predetermined amount of time for a person to move through each stage with this being dependent on a person's individual and social circumstances (Ouspenski, 2014). Fuchs Ebaugh's work on role exit is quite popular and as a result many transitioning models have built on this early work, including Månsson and Hedin's 'breakaway' model – a model that has played a very central role in conceptualisations of 'exiting'.

#### 4.4.1.1 Breaking the Matthew effect/breakaway model

Månsson and Hedin's model was based on a study with 23 Swedish female sex workers (15 had left the industry; 8 were still working). Most of their participants had worked on the streets, and about a third worked indoors. Their model consists of five stages: drifting into sex work; ensnarement in sex work; pre-breakaway; breakaway; and after the breakaway or stabilisation – a sixth stage may include re-entry (Månsson & Hedin, 1999).

In further developing the concept of 'role exit', Hedin and Månsson (2004, p. 225) went on to propose a theory for understanding how women 'breakaway from prostitution', identifying four phases of breakaway:

1. *Preliminary stages of the breakaway*: when a woman is thinking about quitting, seeking alternatives to the sex trade and trying various strategies in order to distance herself from prostitution and to locate the resources and points of support needed for another life.
2. *The turning-point*: when a woman is in the process of deciding to actually break away. This can happen quickly and dramatically, or it can be a more gradual process.
3. *The post-breakaway marginal situation*: when a woman finds herself dangling between two life patterns, living in a state of uncertainty and ambivalence. Here she encounters a number of challenges.
4. *Building a new life*: when a woman develops new roles through work, studies or parenthood. Gradually, old injuries are repaired, and a new life develops. (Hedin & Månsson, 2004, p. 225)

In Månsson and Hedin's work, it is the turning points that lead to a sex worker's decision to leave the industry. Although they argue that structural, relational and individual factors influence a woman's decision to leave, ultimately it is the worker's emotional commitment that becomes the determining factor (Koostra, 2010, p. 11). This is made clear in Månsson and Hedin's interpretation of the Matthew Effect.<sup>7</sup> As Koostra argues, through this framework, Månsson and Hedin 'put individual responsibility of the sex worker or "responsibilization" to the front' (2010, p. 11). This responsabilisation leads to the denial of sex workers' agency as sees them as victims of exploitation and chaotic environments (Koostra, 2010; Ouspenski, 2014). Sanders (2007) has also criticised the breakaway model for its failure to consider the interplay between individual agency and structural factors, including factors like the lack of appropriate and safe and secure housing, lack of drug treatment programs (and relative ineffectiveness of some programs), lack of realistic and appropriate vocational training and alternative employment. For Sanders (2007), putting all the focus on sex workers emphasises victimisation and does little to address the structural barriers that make transitioning difficult (see also Koostra, 2010). The breakaway model is also flawed as, while the research participants included indoor and outdoor workers, it fails to distinguish between the transitioning strategies of these two groups and treats them as homogenous.

The language used in the model pathologises sex work and sex workers, and it is clear that Månsson and Hedin consider sex workers as victims of exploitation rather than adults exercising agency and engaging in work (Koostra, 2010; Ouspenski, 2014). When applying a rights-based perspective, this model is quite problematic because it considers all sex workers as victims (and as damaged women), views sex work as damaging and harmful and something that women remain 'trapped' in and that needs to be escaped. Sex workers are seen as victims that are lured and trapped in sex work (e.g. the rhetoric of becoming 'ensnared' in sex work, needing to 'breakaway' and 'stabilise'). In this perspective, sex workers need to be rescued and it is a framework that is counterintuitive to seeing workers as capable persons able to make decisions and choices about their own lives.

#### 4.4.2 Stages of Change & integrated models

Integrated models of transitioning build on the Stages of Change model developed by Prochaska, DiClemente and Norcross (1992, see also Prochaska and DiClemente, 1983). This section discusses two different models developed using this framework. In brief, the original Stages of Change model identified six stages of change: pre-contemplation (person does not see an issue with what they are doing); contemplation (ambivalent state); decision (person makes a decision and is getting ready for change); action (person makes the change); maintenance (changes have been fully integrated in the person's life); and lapse/relapse (return to old behaviour) (UK NSWP, 2008a, p. 4).

<sup>7</sup> In sociological approaches, the Matthew Effect is about the rich-poor dichotomy and is used to explain how those who have power and status are often placed in situations where they gain more power and status (essentially, advantage begets advantage). Conversely, those who do not have power and status will struggle to improve their lot. In Månsson and Hedin's work the concept refers to cumulative (dis)advantage and a feedback loop where the more unstable the environment is, the less likely people will think about their future and behaviour becomes less forwarding looking. While this may encourage analysis of structural factors, it is 'reckless' behaviour by some that also creates a 'chaotic environment' that encourages similar behaviour by others. Here, the idea of the Matthew Effect is reversed, with disadvantage begetting disadvantage and, as Rigney notes, for the women in Månsson and Hedin's research, attempting to break the downward cycle is 'a painful and precarious process' (2010, p. 58).

The Stages of Change model is one that is widely recognised as aiding in the identification of a person's or an organisation's level of readiness for change and can be further broken down into key zones of change. This includes 1) awareness/desire/knowledge = enablement zone and 2) ability/reinforcement = engagement zone (Prochaska, Prochaska, & Levesque, 2001). The Stages of Change model was originally developed to describe the process people go through when quitting smoking. However, in 2008 the NSWP adapted it for use in developing a transitioning program in the UK, and Baker and colleagues (2010) also used this framework to develop a theoretical model designed to explain the process of leaving sex work.<sup>8</sup>

#### 4.4.2.1 Cycles of Change model

UK NSWP (2008a, p. 5) describe six stages of change:

1. *Pre-contemplation*: a sex worker does not report any issues with work or see any risks, occasionally uses drop-in services.
2. *Contemplation*: worker becomes aware of some of the risks, starts to access services more frequently and expresses dissatisfaction with current circumstances (may also begin disclosing personal information and talking more about the future).
3. *Decision*: worker makes a decisive statement about change (e.g. I've had enough), may contact service providers or make public statements about decision to change involvement in sex work (may have made other changes e.g. moving from injecting to smoking and/or only working at certain times or with particular clients).
4. *Action*: worker completes a care plan, begins accessing supports (e.g. alcohol and other drugs services and/or transitioning services).
5. *Maintenance*: worker regularly attends appointments and is optimistic, more proactive in care plan and making changes.
6. *Relapse*: worker may report sporadic drug use and/or occasional sex work, disengagement from services and missing appointments (service providers may experience difficulty contacting the person).

UK NSWP (2008a, p. 5) indicate that this model can help in identifying the different stages a person may be at, and which interventions could be appropriate at each stage. This, they argue, is important for people providing transitioning services to sex workers and may help influence a person's success in leaving sex work. For example, they suggest that in the pre-contemplation stage a sex worker may experience cognitive dissonance, which would need to be addressed. In the contemplation stage, motivational interviewing can help along with positive statements. At the decision stage, relapse prevention strategies can be useful as well as the provision of information and providing choices and examining potential targets/goals. Monitoring progress and agreed actions is central in the action stage. Appropriate follow-up and group support is necessary in the maintenance stage and exploring difficulties with change may be of use in the relapse stage (UK NSWP, 2008a, p. 4-7).

In developing their model, UK NSWP (2008a) stress the cyclic nature of change, highlighting how a worker may leave sex work many times before leaving the industry altogether. This finding is similar to that of Baker and colleagues (2010), discussed below. The point of departure between the two models is that the UK NSWP (2008a) take a rights-based approach and built the model based on the experiences of sex worker projects throughout the UK. This means that the model is focused on the centrality of a sex worker's right to self-determination. This includes the right to stay in sex work or leave it, and the guiding philosophy is of transitioning services being offered as part of a range of holistic services (needs-based approach) for sex workers (UK NSWP, 2008a, p. 1). This means that transitioning services are one of many options available to workers.

<sup>8</sup> The program designed by the UK NSWP was developed as part of their good practice guidance on sex worker transitioning programs.

#### 4.4.2.2 Integration Model

In addition to the work of the UK NSWP, Baker, Dalla and Williamson (2010) have also developed a model for 'exiting prostitution' based on a review of existing models and their work with street-based 'prostituted women' and the Stages of Change model. Baker, Dalla and Williamson's integration model is also comprised of six stages:

1. *Immersion*: 'the starting point wherein a woman is totally immersed in prostitution and has no thoughts of leaving or any conscious awareness of the need to change' (Baker, Dalla, & Williamson, 2010, p. 590).
2. *Awareness*: at this stage a worker becomes aware of the need to change, but may start to recognise the barriers that prevent leaving, and the stage is comprised of two parts:
  - a) *Visceral awareness*: where 'a woman experiences "gut" feelings about leaving prostitution, yet these feelings cannot be (or are not) articulated to herself or to others' (Baker, Dalla, & Williamson, 2010, p. 591); and
  - b) *Conscious awareness*: whereby a woman 'acknowledges her feelings and begins to process them consciously thereby enabling her to verbalize what she had previously felt at the gut level' (Baker, Dalla, & Williamson, 2010, p. 591).
3. *Deliberate Planning*: where 'a woman begins assessing both formal and informal support resources' and may begin making contact with formal support providers (Baker, Dalla, & Williamson, 2010, p. 592).
4. *Initial Exit*: 'when the woman begins actively using informal (e.g., moving in with a family member) and formal (e.g., attending counseling, entering de-tox) support services' but her 'internal desire and motivation to exit are severely tested' which may prevent her from leaving (Baker, Dalla, & Williamson, 2010, p. 592).
5. *Re-entry*: where a worker may cycle through all or some of the stages again before achieving final exit.
6. *Final Exit*: where a worker leaves the sex industry, permanently or for some period of time before re-entering.

The immersion stage in Baker, Dalla and Williamson's model is similar to the pre-contemplative stage in the original Stages of Change model. In the original model, Prochaska and colleagues' contemplation stage is broken down into two levels of awareness. In Baker, Dalla and Williamson's model, the final level of awareness is akin to the contemplative stage. The deliberative planning stage incorporates aspects of the decision and action stages, and the maintenance stage may be comparable to the initial exit stage as a worker begins to access services and transition out of sex work. As Ouspenski (2014, p. 40) notes, Baker, Dalla and Williamson's model acknowledges that re-entry often takes place and that a person may cycle through the stages of change several times until they reach the 'final exit'.

Baker, Dalla and Williamson note that those who repeatedly cycle through the stages can be especially challenging for service providers, as despite their desire to leave the industry they may feel 'stuck' or 'trapped' because of their previous unsuccessful attempts to exit, which may cause them to disengage from formal support services. This framing is problematic because it tends to highlight deficits in sex workers and as Bowen (2015, p. 433) argues, it focuses only on the individual factors that challenge a worker's exit (e.g. no coping skills and lack of confidence and initiative). Baker, Dalla and Williamson also state that the behaviour of sex workers is challenging for support organisations because 'their lack of behavioral action makes them invisible to support providers' (2010, p. 593), and as Bowen asserts, what is at the crux of this claim is 'researchers suggesting that sex workers need to be more accommodating to support organizations instead of the opposite being true' (2015, p. 433).

According to Koostra (2010, p. 12), as part of their model, Baker, Dalla and Williamson identify barriers that prevent workers from leaving and differentiate between individual, relational, structural and societal factors. Individual level barriers include 'self-destructive' behaviour, substance abuse,



mental health problems and lack of knowledge about services available (Baker, Dalla, & Williamson, 2010). Relational level barriers include strained family relations, social isolation and facilitators or other third parties and drug dealers that keep workers in the sector (Baker, Dalla, & Williamson, 2010). Structural barriers include limited job skills and employment opportunities, lack of appropriate and safe housing, lack of economic self-sufficiency and inadequate services and at the societal level, sex workers face stigma and discrimination (Baker, Dalla, & Williamson, 2010).

### 4.4.3 Typologies of transitioning: shaping & framing understandings of transitions

Technically speaking, the next two frameworks are not considered as theoretical frameworks similar to those discussed above. These models are more like classification systems or typologies that offer an understanding of transitions based on key characteristics and themes identified in research with sex workers. The two typologies have been included because they are relevant to understanding and framing transitioning and transitioning processes and as they have come from sex workers direct experiences, can be useful in informing program design and service delivery.

#### 4.4.3.1 Sanders’ typology of transitions

Sanders’ (2007, p. 81-90) typology is based on a study with thirty UK-based female sex workers (15 ex-outdoor workers and 15 ex-indoor workers). The work offers an alternative perspective to the theories discussed above as Sanders attempted to develop a typology of transitions out of sex work for both indoor and outdoor workers. The typology identifies four types of transitioning, or routine pathways out of sex work, and specific triggers for indoor and outdoor workers according to each transition type, which are summarised in the table below.

**Table 1: Typology of transitions**

Type of transition	Trigger for street worker	Trigger for indoor worker
<b>Reactionary</b>	Violence, ill health, significant life events (e.g. pregnancy/child removal, imprisonment)	New relationship, being discovered, violence
<b>Gradual planning</b>	Drug treatment program, rehousing, welfare support, therapeutic engagement	Timed transition alongside alternative career and financial planning
<b>Natural progression</b>	Desire for a new, safer lifestyle that is drug free, concerned about working conditions	Age, natural career length, disillusionment with working conditions/lack of regulation
<b>Yo-yoing</b>	Failed drug treatment and support package, drift in and out, criminal justice involvement	Unplanned exit, psychological strain, working ‘on and off’/career break

Source: Sanders, 2007, p. 81.

Sanders’ model clearly addresses the main reasons for workers leaving sex work, which is important in understanding worker motivations and facilitating transitions. The triggers can also aid understanding what events might lead workers to engage in the type of transitioning identified in the research. For example, in the reactionary category, Sanders’ highlights how the reasons for leaving sex work were often in direct response to significant life events and may not necessarily be as permanent as the other types of transitions identified in the typology. This is because, the transition might not be well thought out and accompanied by a lack of conscious planning on how to earn money outside of sex work (Koostra, 2010, p. 12). The gradual planning category focuses on workers leaving sex work and using agencies to access services, including drug and alcohol treatment, and this type of transition may also be accompanied by a worker limiting the amount of time they are engaged in sex work or the number of clients they may see (Ouspenski, 2014, p. 39). The gradual planning process takes longer and is a more prepared process, and workers using this strategy will often save up money to prepare for a reduction in income (more common among indoor workers), while outdoor workers may reduce the number of clients or start drug therapy. Natural progression accounts for the experiences of workers akin to retirement age for indoor workers (i.e. getting older and receiving less clients or having enough of working (e.g. age and being fed up with working



conditions as factors for leaving), while for outdoors workers this may be wanting a lifestyle free of drug use and the fear of violence or actual violence.

The yo-yoing pattern of moving in and out of sex work held for indoor and outdoor workers. Many workers in Sanders study were in this category, and as Ouspenski (2014, p. 39) suggests this may be because they lack a strong and workable transitioning plan. It also indicates the difficulties some workers face when trying to leave sex work. Sanders (2007) suggests that workers may come back because of financial reasons or starting a drug habit again and the need for money. To explain worker perceptions in this category, indoor workers told Sanders that sometimes they needed 'time out' and here Sanders argues that the lack of good working conditions leads to significant occupational stress and strain as sex workers do not get sick pay or leave, no paid holidays or regulated working conditions and exploitative management that may expect people to work long shifts and frequent days (Sanders, 2007, p. 88). Further, indoor workers yo-yoed because the money they earned in 'normal' jobs in mainstream labour markets was inadequate compared with sex work, and here yo-yoing was often accompanied by an unplanned exit. For outdoor workers, involvement with the criminal justice sector often set yo-yoing in motion, with some workers returning to sex work in order to pay fines, while other workers without planned transitions moved back into sex work because of the need to earn money for drugs (Sanders, 2007, p. 87).

Sanders' model adopts a rights-based approach and is able to consider sex workers' individual agency without downplaying the barriers they face in leaving the industry. It clearly shows that, for some workers, leaving sex work is not something that happens quickly, and can be a long process that is not straightforward. As Koostra suggests, Sanders' study 'withholds a moral condemnation of sex work' and 'provides pragmatic tools on how to assist sex workers best if they choose to leave sex work' (2010, p. 13). However, as Bowen (2015, p. 433) argues, an issue with Sanders typology is the focus it maintains on leaving sex work, and as a result re-entry is depicted as chaotic, which is similar to the framing of re-entry in the other models discussed so far. This means that there is little discussion of a person's strategic involvement in sex work like Ham and Gilmour's (2016) research where workers maintained dual careers as part of their 'exit strategies'.

#### 4.4.3.2 Bowen: sex-work-no-more, sex-work-maybe & dual-life

Bowen's (2015, p. 438-445) work is based on a study with twenty-two active and former off-street sex workers from Vancouver (18 women; 3 men; and 1 gender queer worker). Bowen's model offers a different perspective on transitioning by focusing on indoor workers that work in different areas of the industry. Through this Bowen was able to identify three different types of transitioning statuses: sex-work-no-more; sex-work-maybe; and dual-life.

Sex-work-no-more: Seventeen research participants had left sex work. Bowen (2015, pp. 438-439) identified nine as being part of a 'sex-work-no-more' category. Participants that Bowen included in this category had numerous overlapping categories facilitating transitions, including being in love or falling out of love, health conditions and frustration with sex work. Here Bowen argued that for those in the sex-work-no-more category, 'leaving the industry was a way to eliminate harm, gain control over their lives, and align thoughts about sex work with their behaviors' (2015, p. 438). For this group, support from other people, assistance from sex worker organisations and government agencies and employment were all key factors aiding in transitions, and for people who wanted to leave sex work, earning a livable wage was among their chief concern.

Sex-work-maybe: Bowen (2015, pp. 439-440) identified eight participants as fitting this category, with their reasons for leaving sex work being similar to those in the sex-work-no-more category. Barriers for returning to the industry included stable 'square' (non-sex work) jobs, love, and uncertainty about how engaging in sex work may affect sobriety and mental health, others were also worried about changes in sex work practices and maintaining personal boundaries (e.g. GFE [the Girlfriend Experience]) (Bowen, 2015, p. 439). The participants in this group viewed sex work as an option for future employment, with some explaining how their 'relationship with sex work felt unfinished: "I don't think that I'm done with [sex work] ... I would go back ... I would ideally do it in a more intentional way"' (Bowen, 2015, p. 439). As Bowen (2015, pp. 439-440) points out, 'intentional' challenges conventional understandings of re-entry in transitioning studies and the idea of re-entry as a relapse, a term often associated with addiction, or as chaotic or disorderly and related to

structural factors (see, for example, Baker, Dalla, & Williamson, 2010; Hedin & Månsson, 2004; Mayhew & Mossman, 2007; Sanders, 2007). As Bowen (2015, p. 440) argues, some people recommence sex work because they want to, and see 'sex-work-maybe' as keeping their options open. It is a way for workers to control how and when they exit, and instead of being chaotic, some workers are demonstrating and exercising agency in setting their own agenda and timeline and transitioning in their own way.

*Dual-life:* Fifteen participants were included in this category. Dual-life participants worked simultaneously in sex work and 'square' work. Bowen (2015, p. 444) argues that participants in the 'dual-life' category challenge conventional thinking as they show how there are many ways to be a sex worker. Their experiences also disrupt binary understandings of sex work as something that a person is either 'in' or 'out' of. For some workers, maintaining a dual-life was seen as a way to reduce burnout and frustration and involved finding a balance between working just enough in sex work to get the income needed, and not so much that it caused burnout or frustration (Bowen, 2015, p. 440). Through this category, Bowen is able to challenge Sanders' concept of 'yo-yoing' (workers moving in and out of sex work because of structural factors), leading to the argument that the dual-life group saw sex work as a way to get additional income and they worked in both fields because it was the best way to do sex work. For some workers, it was a way to address labour issues in the sex industry, for example, Theresa told Bowen: 'I want to have medical plan, sick leave, vacation pay ... I want that option in my life' (Theresa, cited in Bowen, 2015, p. 444). As Bowen (2015, p. 444) suggests for workers like Theresa, doing sex work and square work allowed Theresa to access employment benefits not available in sex work. Flexible working arrangements in sex work supported duality and for dual-life workers one of the most important issues was the need to manage information to avoid stigma and discrimination (Bowen, 2015, p. 444). Transitioning programs need to recognise the concept of duality in order to support workers as they attempt to develop strategies for the challenges they face in both jobs. It may also be a way for workers to develop their own transitioning plans and transition on their own terms.

The review has identified a number of transitioning models and a variety of typologies that can be used to develop an evidence-based framework for a transitioning program. A thing to keep in mind, however, is that some of the models, especially those based on the Stages of Change framework, focus predominately on the individual (take a micro approach and are highly individualised), and can appear as linear. While some of the models identified in the literature clearly differentiate between street-based and other forms of (indoor) sex work, some tend to see street work as a problem, and the focus on leaving sex work can reinforce the idea that sex work is not work, rather a social problem that needs to be fixed. It is also important to note that returning to sex work and/or part-time engagement in sex work does not necessarily mean a worker's attempt to leave is unsuccessful; however, in some of the transitioning studies reviewed, re-entry seems to be viewed as a failure. For example, Baker, Dalla and Williamson's (2010) view re-entry as an unsuccessful attempt to take on an ex-role. While some sex workers may view re-entry in this way, Bowen's work shows how this is not the case for all workers. As one sex-work-maybe participant said: 'I don't think [sex work] will ever be off the table ... I'm always gonna know how to find a client. I can never be truly fucked with those skills' (Simone, cited in Bowen, 2015, p. 440). Similarly, dual-life workers utilise more than one income source, and do so by engaging in 'sexiting', or doing sex work and other work as a way to fund leaving sex work.

Clearly, keeping options open gives some workers a sense of economic security, and as Bowen suggests, there is a 'need for openness and candor around reentry in the conceptualization of transition programs. Sex workers need space to explore reentry and position them[selves] in relation to it' (2015, p. 440). 'Sex-work-maybe' and 'sexiting' may be a way for sex workers to fund transitions and maintain standards of living and is also a reminder that the incomes earned in some non-sex work jobs can be inadequate when compared with the incomes available in sex work.

Stigma and discrimination is one the biggest barriers sex workers face, and as Bowen (2015, p. 442) reflects:

reducing where stigma and diminishing its effects among active, former, and dual-life populations will be a major task for transitioning programs [and] sex-work-maybe participants

and those who lived dual-lives may find little benefit from attending transition programs that deny or reject the ways that they include sex work in their lives. Transition programs need to accommodate those who may return to sex work and those who live dual-lives. (Bowen, 2015, p. 445)

Bowen's observations are important for any transitioning program. This is because a well-designed program needs to take into account duality and 'sexiting'. Some of the models discussed in this section suggest ways that transitioning programs can do this and develop a framework of sex work as work. A well-designed transitioning program needs to take a broader view of a person's involvement in sex work beyond the 'in/out' binary, and working on a rights-based framework, the program needs to create supportive environments that help facilitate access to services – this includes expanding life choices and a person's right to determine whether they want to remain in or leave sex work.

## 5 Transitioning programs: establishing a framework for promising practices

In this section of the report the barriers to leaving sex work identified in the review of the literature and interviews with stakeholders are discussed. Acknowledging the barriers faced can be useful in the design of a transitioning program and identifying needs and resources. In the remainder of this section, promising practice in transitioning programs are identified, including the principles for effective program design (see Appendix 1 and Sandy, Meenagh and Nes-ladicola, 2019).

These principles have been developed from a best practice framework for transitioning programs reported in the Technical and Background Paper. In brief, the essential features of promising practice identified in the background paper include:

Program framework and logic:

- sex work as work (and the framing of sex work as skilled work);
- theory-based;
- intersectional lens; and
- resilience-based model.

Essential elements of promising practice in program design and service delivery:

- sex worker-led (principle of self-determination and autonomy);
- person-first and client-driven approach;
- holistic intervention;
- incorporates peer engagement and outreach;
- multi-agency partnerships;
- continuous improvement;
- transparency, equity in access and boundary management; and
- addressing internal and external stigma and discrimination against sex workers.

In addition, this part of the report discusses the framing of a program based on the idea of **career development** rather than 'exiting' and a programmatic focus on leaving the sex industry. In the program framing discussed in this part of the report, career development is defined as follows: 'career development of sex workers aims at empowering sex workers with life skills, information and support needed to make informed decisions on their current and future life' (Kootstra, 2010, p. 1). This focus on career development expands the definition and programmatic focus beyond 'exiting' and can assist in reversing a trend noted by Ham and Gilmour (2016). In most transitioning programs for sex workers, the focus is the opposite of traditional career transitioning/development programs. Career development programs usually focus on assisting a person's entry into a new occupation or skills development for supporting career progression. However, most transitioning programs for sex workers focus on getting workers out of sex work (and the barriers to leaving). In what follows, the report explores some of the reasoning behind this and explains how the idea of career development introduces a fifth category and programmatic focus, namely mobility within the industry and upskilling.

## 5.1 Transitioning needs: Barriers to leaving sex work

Table 2 below identifies the barriers to leaving sex work and the wide range of issues that transitioning programs need to address. The table has been adapted from Månsson and Hedin (1999), Baker, Dalla and Williamson (2010) and Koostra's (2010) work and is supplemented with a review of the literature as well as data from interviews with peer and non-peer organisations providing services to sex workers in Australia and New Zealand (Baker, Dalla, & Williamson, 2010; Bindel et al., 2012; Bowen, 2015; Ham & Gilmour, 2016; Koostra, 2010; Law, 2103; Månsson & Hedin, 1999; Mayhew & Mossman, 2007; Ouspenski, 2014; Sanders, 2007; Sandy, Meenagh, & Nes-ladicola, 2019; UK NSWP, 2008a). The table is organised by *individual factors* (factors associated with a person's own 'mental drives and abilities'), *relational factors* (factors associated with close relationships and informal social networks), *structural factors* (factors associated with societal circumstances) and includes Baker and colleagues' forth tier, *societal factors* (i.e. social perceptions of sex work that are likely to impact on the other three factors) (Månsson & Hedin, 1999, p. 74; Baker, Dalla, & Williamson, 2010, p. 590).

**Table 2: Barriers to leaving sex work**

<b>Barriers to leaving sex work</b>	
<b>Individual</b>	Satisfied with sex work and income; no reason to change jobs
	Lifestyle (used to income and job freedom)
	Lack of education & skills for other work
	Debts, economic necessity, financial problems
	Lack of viable alternative income
	Medical and/or mental health issues (this also includes poor dental health & trauma as a result of domestic violence and/or childhood abuse)
	Criminal record (may need to be disclosed to potential employers)
	Lack of knowledge of services available and/or low trust in service providers
	Drug and/or alcohol abuse
	Starting sex work at a young age
	Self-stigmatisation and internalisation of stigma (low self-worth, guilt and hopelessness, taking on a 'deviant' identity) and social exclusion
<b>Relational</b>	Strong social support network (in sex work) and social isolation (loss of social support network outside of sex work)
	Strained family relationships (providing little/no support – limited formal and informal support)
	Facilitators or partners preventing leave
	Drug dealers preventing leave
	Social isolation and cutting ties/relationships with former colleagues after leaving sex work
<b>Structural</b>	Meeting basic needs (housing, homelessness, poverty, economic self-sufficiency)
	Limited job opportunities offering viable income/lack of economically viable jobs
	Limited access to quality education and/or vocational education and training
	Lack of appropriate housing (includes lack of access to refuge accommodation – some refuges might not accept women fleeing from family violence who use alcohol and/or drugs)
	Limited access to and/or inadequate services (non-discriminatory) and/or services not available at the time the person seeks assistance
	Lack of access to a range of drug treatment services (and inflexibility in service delivery)
	Limited access to/lack of access to residential treatment programs
	Lack of cooperation between service providers
	Incarceration and fines
	Job agencies and mainstream employers not recognising sex work as work
	Judgemental and discriminatory service providers
Judgemental and discriminatory employers and workplaces	
<b>Societal</b>	Stigma and discrimination and viewing sex work as deviance/harmful
	Criminalisation of sex work/locating sex work within a criminal justice framework

Source: Månsson and Hedin, 1999, pp. 73-75, Baker, Dalla and Williamson, 2010, pp. 588-590, Koostra, 2010, p. 15 and interview data.



Table 2 very clearly demonstrates the difficulties some sex workers face in transitioning. Some of these factors were discussed in the previous section and are supported by studies that document women’s attempts to leave or retire from sex work. This research demonstrates how leaving sex work is not an easy process for some sex workers, In Hester and Westmarland’s (2004) research just over two-thirds of street-based sex workers tried to leave more than one time. Benoit and Millar (2001) noted seven in ten women had tried to leave at least once, while more than half of the women in their study had tried to leave three or more times. This leads them to conclude that street-based sex workers try to leave sex work on average five to six times (Benoit & Millar, 2001). However, any discussion of barriers needs to be mindful of how this is often shaped around the idea of recommencing sex work as a failure to ‘exit’. Most transitioning research fails to understand and incorporate the concepts of duality and ‘sexiting’, and sex workers’ own strategic involvement in sex work and ‘square’ work as part of transitioning. Law’s (2011) research helps in understanding how some of these studies may not consider this aspect from a sex workers’ perspective and how it may be the best way for them to engage in sex work and avoid burnout or facilitate transitions. The adoption of a strengths-based, community empowerment approach may go some way to addressing these issues.

## 5.2 What might ‘promising practice’ in transitioning programs look like?

The international and national research evidence and stakeholder interviews regarding the design and implementation of transitioning programs suggest a number of features for effective practice that could be useful in developing a framework for promising practices. Some of this is outlined in detail in the accompanying Technical and Background Paper (Sandy, Meenagh, & Nes-ladicola, 2019). This section of the report draws on the work undertaken in the Technical Paper in order to develop principles and a framework for establishing emerging and promising practices in the sector.

### 5.2.1 Promising practice principles for transitioning programs

In Australia, and internationally, transitioning has historically taken place with the understanding of sex work as a harmful and dangerous practice and within the framework of ‘exiting’ sex work (and by extension, sex workers’ behaviour as problematic and in need of change). By comparison, transitioning programs tailored for sex workers within the framework of sex work as work and a rights-based approach are few, and even fewer have been evaluated or documented in the literature. As such, it may be useful to preface the following discussion of emerging and promising practice with an overview of some promising practice principles for effective program design, drawn from the fields of violence prevention and respectful relationships programming (Sandy, Powell, Meenagh, & O’Neill, 2017, p. 23). Table 3 outlines a number of key features in effective education and prevention program design that can be useful in designing and evaluating transitioning programs.

**Table 3: Ten Key Principles of Effective Program Design**

<b>Ten key principles of effective program design</b>	
<b>Theory-based</b>	is informed by a theory of change that clearly identifies the activities that are expected to lead to interim and longer-term outcomes as well as conceptualising why, and for whom, the activities are anticipated to effect change.
<b>Incorporates participatory design approaches</b>	that involves participation of the relevant audience and/or community members in the co-design and implementation of strategies.
<b>Comprehensive in coverage</b>	that targets factors at <i>multiple levels</i> of the social ecology, including strategies to reach individuals, peer groups and communities; while also considering <i>multiple strategies</i> directed at changes in knowledge, attitudes and behaviour.
<b>Sufficient in ‘dosage’ or exposure</b>	delivering a sustained engagement with the content, rather than one-off information exposure.
<b>Draws on varied teaching and/or content approaches</b>	that engage recipients with a range of information, interactive exercises, opportunities to reflect on and apply their new knowledge and skills.



<b>Is appropriate</b>	considers content types, appropriate language, and varying levels of detailed information in regard to experiences.
<b>Is socioculturally relevant and contextualised to local communities/settings</b>	that considers the structural context of localised communities (e.g. unequal access to education and other resources), as well as localised beliefs and norms related to the issue being targeted.
<b>Draws on strengths-based approaches</b>	that provides opportunities for developing positive experiences and confidence in skills and capabilities.
<b>Engages well-trained and supported staff/trainers</b>	who understand and are committed to the theory of change, the key principles underlying the program and delivering a consistent approach.
<b>Includes an outcome evaluation</b>	that seeks to measure changes in knowledge, attitudes and behaviour over the short and longer-term.

Source: Sandy, Powell, Meenagh and O'Neill, 2017, p. 23 (adapted from Casey & Lindhorst, 2009; DeGrace & Clarke, 2012; DeGue, 2014; Michau et al., 2015; Nation et al., 2003).

## 5.2.2 Promising practice 'in practice': Program models & case studies

There is a relatively short history of transitioning programs in Australia, and much of the recent work is yet to be published or publicly available. In order to document this work and distil key program components of promising practice in the sector, consultations were undertaken with peer and non-peer organisations in Australia and New Zealand. The programs were also evaluated in line with the following questions developed by Soriano, Clark and Wise (2008, p. 94-95) as part of their work on promising practices profiles for the Australian Institute of Family Studies:

1. What works?
2. Why does it work?
3. Under what circumstances does it work?
4. What are the outcomes?

The evidence review did identify several programs that can be considered as examples of promising and/or emerging practice, and these programs are discussed in the following case studies. The case studies have been selected as they are part of an active move away from exploitation and/or sex work as harmful framings of sex work that dominate approaches to transitioning and have explicitly adopted sex worker-centred methodologies and sex work as work and/or rights-based framings.

### 5.2.2.1 Case study one: Career Development Program, Respect Inc, Queensland<sup>9</sup>

#### Background

There is a long history of transition programs in Queensland, with re-training/'exiting' programs being run in the state since implementation of the *Prostitution Act (1999)* (Crime and Misconduct Commission (CMC), 2004). Prior to Respect Inc. receiving funding for the program, it was run by a variety of agencies. The last agency to offer the program, BSI Learning, delivered a service that adopted a case management approach similar to that being used in their post-release prison program (BSI Learning, 2013 a, b, c; CMC, 2011, p. 37).<sup>10</sup> In 2016, Respect Inc. developed the Career Development Program (CDP) with funding from the Queensland Government Department of Health. In developing their program, Respect Inc. decided to run it as a career development program rather than an 'exiting' type of program. This is because:

... a lot of sex workers were saying that they felt that it would be better to run it in more of a development program rather than an exiting program and also to do it within a sex workers' rights framework rather than a - you know, because BSI were also running the post release prisoners' program, and they were doing the transitioning program with the post release

<sup>9</sup> The case study was compiled from an interview with Respect Inc. and information available on the Respect Inc. website and in varied reports (e.g. CAV, 2007; CMC, 2004, 2011).

<sup>10</sup> Queensland's program was run by Southern Edge Training in 2005. This organisation was interviewed by Victoria's *Prostitution Control Act* Ministerial Advisory Committee as part of their 2005 review (CAV, 2007).

prisoners' program ... [and that] didn't go down very well ... so there was a big push at the time that ... we would have a go ... so that it would be run with sex workers' empowerment [framework]. (Interview with Respect Inc.)

## The program

After conducting a needs assessment with sex workers, Respect Inc. designed a program that focused on career development rather than 'exiting'. CDP focuses on upskilling in sex work, with the activities designed to build upon and expand sex work and business skills alongside skills development for work outside of the industry. The program is tailored around providing services for sex workers who want to develop their careers inside and outside of sex work. Activities include basic bookkeeping skills, financial training (including tax returns and budgeting) as well as advertising, promotions and marketing. Other activities focus on building skills in growth areas in sex work, for example, Touching Base (skills training for providing services for people with disabilities) and other areas of specialised services (e.g. BDSM). Intensive case management is provided for workers with more complex needs (e.g. housing, mental health and/or alcohol and drug treatment).

CDP has two formats: a shorter three-month program or a longer twelve-month program for workers with more complex needs. The three-month program provides more of an information and referral service and the twelve-month program is focused on intensive case management, with program options shaped around the idea of transitioning in, out or around sex work. The twelve-month program also comes with access to a subsidy (max. value \$800) provided by the Prostitution Licensing Authority. This enables transitions by providing workers with assistance in meeting some of the costs associated with courses (for example, if a worker is not eligible for a Certificate III guarantee), or course materials and equipment (e.g. books or a laptop).

The program was not only designed and developed through a needs assessment (to ensure that it was meeting the needs identified by sex workers) but has also seen Respect Inc. work very closely with Queensland Health to promote the benefits of the approach as compared to previous 'exiting' programs.

## Key points

- Meets best practice: program model places sex workers at the centre, applies the Ottawa Charter (WHO, 1986) and the key principle that the involvement of sex workers, as an affected community, is vital to sustainable and effective programs.
- Designed and developed by sex workers and based on a needs assessment.
- Career development program – focus is not on 'exiting' but building and strengthening skills, increasing confidence and expanding life choices.
- Holistic service provision: transitioning as one of the services and options available and the program goal is to support sex workers to make an informed decision (not 'exiting' as main goal but creating choices).

### 5.2.2.2 Case study two: Transitions Consortium, Vancouver, Canada

#### Background

The metropolitan Vancouver area is recognised as having one of the largest sex worker populations in North America (Vancouver Transitions, 2018a). Despite having one of the largest sex worker populations in Canada, prior to 2011, there were very few services that specifically focussed on assisting sex workers in reducing their reliance on sex work and overcoming barriers in transitioning to other forms of employment. Because of this, the Transitions Consortium emerged as an inter-agency collaborative effort designed to cultivate a model of best practice for the provision of transitioning services/programs to sex workers in the Vancouver area (Ouspenski, 2014).

The development of the Consortium followed from the creation of the City of Vancouver's Task Force on Sex Work and Sexual Exploitation in 2011. Initially, six organisations 'with a vast range of

expertise in delivering services to individuals engaged in the sex industry’ made up the Consortium; however, one organisation has since left (Ouspenski, 2014, p. 4).<sup>11</sup> The five remaining organisations in the Transitions Consortium include: Battered Women’s Support Services (BWSS), the Aboriginal Front Door Society (AFDS), Health Initiative for Men (HiM), Wish Drop-In Centre and Providing Alternatives, Counselling, and Education (PACE) Society.

A large range of organisations collaborate in providing this transitioning program, and the vision, mission and core values that comprise the scaffolding of all member organisations is summarised in Table 4 below. As the table demonstrates, Consortium member organisations work from a rights-based and sex work positive lens and recognise the diversity among sex workers and their experiences (Vancouver Transitions, 2018a). In the composition of the Consortium, each different organisation has an area of specialisation or expertise with a particular client group, and this has shaped the Consortium’s transitioning program. The organisations that are a part of the Consortium have each developed unique aspects of the transitioning program designed to meet the needs of Vancouver’s diverse sex worker population (i.e. Aboriginal/First Nation sex workers, street-based sex workers, indoor sex workers, male, trans and gender diverse sex workers, etc.).

**Table 4: Metro Vancouver Transitions Consortium (vision, mission & core values)**

<b>Metro Vancouver Transitions Consortium – Program framework</b>		
<b>Vision</b>	<b>Mission</b>	<b>Core Values</b>
Autonomy, access and opportunity for sex workers.	To provide sex workers and people involved in sex work with a range of options and supports to meet their unique needs; based on their individual context and experiences; through a human rights, person-centred approach.	Respect, inclusion, and self-determination

Source: Vancouver Transitions, 2018a.

Although each organisation in the Consortium has developed a unique program, all organisations follow a similar program structure and mode of service delivery. Core program elements include employment support, individualised support/intervention, academic support and provision of relevant social/cultural activities (Vancouver Transitions, 2018b). Further to this, all organisations offer a blend of service delivery through one-on-one support (e.g. case management) and peer/group support. Post-program support is also a part of each organisation’s individual transitioning program. Finally, emphasis is placed on the provision of transitioning support within a more holistic support model. This means that all organisations operate a drop-in centre to facilitate sex worker engagement, rapport-building, and access to harm reduction and safer sex supplies. The organisations also employ a variety of outreach and netreach services, and all organisations provide assistance to people who want to remain in the sex industry. All members of the Consortium offer support with auxiliary needs such as housing, mental/sexual/physical health, drug and alcohol services, and other related needs). The organisations that make up the Transitions Consortium and their programs are described below.

## The Programs

### *Aboriginal Front Door Society (target sex worker group: Aboriginal sex workers)*

The Aboriginal Front Door Society (AFDS) provides support to sex workers of all genders that wish to leave the sex industry. AFDS operates from a harm reduction framework and emphasises a non-judgemental method of client engagement (AFDS, 2012). Unique to the Transitions Consortium, the Aboriginal Front Door Society model centres on an Aboriginal cultural approach and offers peer support, workshops and cultural circles and individual support. Workshops and Circles are delivered every fortnight and offer a variety of support such as: cultural activities (e.g. sweats/ceremonies), academic support, employment and life skills, internal/external referrals and access to elders (AFDS,

<sup>11</sup> SWAN Vancouver is no longer a part of the Consortium. Swan specifically works with indoor migrant sex workers in the Vancouver area. To learn more about Swan see: <http://swanvancouver.ca/>

2012; Ouspenski, 2014). For clients attending the workshops/circles, lunch and transport is provided free of cost, and while 'the centre operates mainly as a drop-in, it also offers other services, such as serving as a crisis centre, brokering long-term and specialty trauma counselling, and doing court accompaniments' (Ouspenski, 2014, p. 11). The AFDS Transitions Program 'helps women, men and transgender (two spirited) people of all ages ... to exit sex work using an Aboriginal Cultural approach' (AFDS, 2012). The program does so by blending individual support with group workshops and cultural circles to ensure support is holistic and all-encompassing, and a comprehensive care plan is developed upon intake for each person taking part in the program.

*WISH-Drop In Centre (target sex worker group: street-based sex workers)*

WISH-Drop In Centre offers a variety of services for sex workers and focuses on providing support to street based sex workers in Vancouver. This includes music therapy (drumming circles, song writing support, jam sessions); WAG (women's advisory group); MAP (mobile access project) outreach; Aboriginal Health & Safety Project; Drop-in services; women's-only clinical services; Supportive Employment Program; and the Learning Centre (WISH Drop-In Centre, 2018a). Among this work, the Learning Centre and Supportive Employment Program are considered the two main transitioning services. The WISH Learning Centre works in collaboration with Capilano University and provides a range of individual and group services such as arts and crafts workshops, support with computer skills, communication skills-building, journal writing/poetry and self-advocacy skills (WISH Drop-In Centre, 2018b). The Supportive Employment Program (SEP) focuses on assisting sex workers to build skills and overcome barriers to mainstream employment (WISH Drop-In Centre, 2018c). The organisation's Peer Volunteer and Peer Safety Patrol Programs work as entry points into SEP. The program connects with local businesses to facilitate employment opportunities for graduates of SEP.

*HiM: Transitions (target sex worker group: male sex workers)*

Health Initiative for Men (HiM) is a non-profit organisation providing an extensive range of mental/physical/sexual health and well-being services predominantly (albeit not exclusively) for gay men in Vancouver through five drop-in centres (HiM, 2018a).<sup>12</sup> The programs and services at HiM are guided by a sex-positive, sex work as work, strengths-based framework. HiM took over Peers Vancouver's 'Hustle' programme when Peers closed in 2012 and renamed it 'Transitions' with the onset of the Consortium (Ouspenski, 2014, p. 12). In addition to 'Transitions', HiM also operates 'Hustle' (How U Survive This Life Everyday), an outreach-based program for male workers.

Transitions is a four-phase transitioning program that aims to build skills and confidence to enable male and trans sex workers to exit, retire, or reduce reliance on sex work (HiM, 2018b). The program phases include:

- Pre-engagement: initial referrals to program.
- Phase One: intake, needs assessment, internal/external referrals.
- Phase Two: case management, life skills and capacity building workshops, reviewing care plans.
- Phase Three: workshops geared towards employable skills/employment, addressing remaining identified goals, graduation.
- Post-Engagement Phase: development of an after-care plan, remaining referrals, monthly after-care peer support group, ongoing follow-up with graduates.

Complimenting the Transitions program, 'Hustle' is an outreach and support program run by experiential workers to assist self-identified male sex workers address any expressed needs/goals. Support offered through Hustle may include mental health, sexual health, and physical health referrals and support, ID replacements, individualised care plan support, outreach services, alcohol

<sup>12</sup> While HiM's programs and services are specifically designed for gay men, sex work specific program like Transitions and HUSTLE focus on male sex workers, regardless of sexual orientation, and also include trans sex workers.

and other drugs treatment and recovery services and community education and advocacy activities (HiM, 2018c). HiM also engages in research projects with the University of British Columbia and BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS including the CHAPS (Community Health Assessment of Men who Purchase and Sell Sex) and SPACES (Sex Power Agency Consent Environment Safety) Projects as well as using outreach and netreach to engage with Vancouver's diverse male sex worker population (Ouspenski, 2014, p. 13).

*BWSS (target sex worker group: sex workers experiencing domestic violence/abusive relationships)*

Battered Women's Support Services (BWSS) operates from a feminist, anti-oppression and decolonising framework in order to provide support to women that have experienced domestic violence. While BWSS provides services for self-identified women of all ages, focused support is available for historically marginalised women, including women of colour and precarious immigration status, sex workers, gay women and women with a disability (Ouspenski, 2014, p. 8). The core services offered by BWSS include: crisis line; outreach program; legal support/advocacy; counselling; crisis support/accompaniment; employment program; victim support services; and services specifically tailored to First Nation/Immigrant women (Ouspenski, 2014, p. 8). Sex workers accessing BWSS services usually involve partner and/or pimp violence and abuse (BWSS, 2017).

*PACE (target sex worker group: all sex workers)*

Providing Alternatives, Counselling, and Education (PACE) Society is a peer-driven sex worker organisation (made up of peers and allies) that has provided peer-led services and peer-designed programs since 1994. Ousepenski states that PACE's 'programs and services are based on a peer education model that recognizes that experiential knowledge is critical to culturally appropriate service delivery' (2014, p. 10). This includes health and legal advocacy, public education, research, violence prevention education (including self-defence classes for sex workers), drop-in services (safety workshops, bad date reporting, clothing bank, bus tickets), weekly social group gatherings, peer outreach services (distribution of harm reduction supplies/safer sex supplies) and one-on-one support services (PACE Society, 2016a, b). One-on-one support services are contingent upon a sex worker's expressed needs, and transitioning support is also offered if a worker identifies this as a need. Transitioning support is offered within a generalist model of individualised support (i.e. there is no transitioning specific program, but transitioning support is offered as part of a range of services available). Other types of support offered through one-on-one support include but are not limited to: reference letter assistance for housing, employment and court, gender self-determination project (assisting queer and transgender clients to change name and gender marker), individualised goal setting and assistance with family reunification, among a range of other general services (PACE Society, 2016a, b).

## Key Points

- The Consortium approach offers a different way of thinking about the provision of transitioning services that is not reliant on an individual organisation providing services but a collaboration of organisations providing individual programs within an overarching program framework.
- Transitions Consortium includes organisations with expertise in working with different groups of workers to ensure transitioning support is all-inclusive and that sex workers traditionally marginalised in transitioning programs can access services and have a voice.
- Working as a consortium of service providers allows for the provision of culturally-appropriate services and referrals between members of consortium.
- Strategic networking (i.e. in the case of WISH's SEP program) with businesses to facilitate employment opportunities for those wanting to leave the industry or seek alternate employment.
- Mix of group and individual support services for transitioning.



- Support services offered for both remaining in the industry and transitioning out of the industry (for example, the services offered by PACE and HiM).

### 5.2.2.3 Case study three: Peers Victoria Resources Society, Victoria, B.C., Canada

#### Background

Peers Victoria Resources Society is a grassroots non-profit organisation created by a small group of former sex workers in 1994. The organisation incorporated in 1995 and was originally conceived as 'Prostitutes Anonymous' – a loosely organised group supporting women wishing to leave the sex industry. Members of Peers questioned the organisation being modelled on a 12-step substance recovery model, and with a change to the framework guiding the organisation, the name was revised to PEERS (Prostitutes Empowerment Education and Resources Society) (Peers Victoria Resources Society, 2014a). A key reason for this change was the name and program model was felt to be exclusionary, particularly for people who wanted to stay in the industry and was inflexible to the dynamics of transitioning. In 2009 the organisation's name was updated from PEERS to Peers Victoria Resources Society to account for a change in language from 'prostitute' to 'sex worker'.

In 1997, Peers Victoria received funding from the provincial government to provide 'training and employment for survivors of prostitution and programs and services for sex workers' and with time, the initial grant of \$200,000 came to constitute the organisation's ongoing core funding (Rabinovitch & Strega, 2004, p. 141). In addition to funding received for transitioning services, Peers Victoria also receives funding through program or project grants from Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC), and foundation grants and donations.

#### Guiding Principles and Core Programs/Services

The organisation's core values are centred on 'choice' and 'experiential voice'. These core values shape both the employment structure of the organisation and the programs and services offered:

PEERS has always been an organization of sex trade workers. Volunteers, Board, and staff are almost all people who have been in the sex trade themselves. The constitution states that the Board must be over 50% experiential members, and most staff positions are reserved for experiential applicants only. Non-experiential, or mainstream people, are called in or hired for their specialized skills such as research coordination or housing development, when needed. (Rabinovitch & Lewis, 2001, p. 14)<sup>13</sup>

In addition, Peers Victoria stresses the importance of employment at the organisation as playing an important role in transitioning out of sex work and into other forms of employment (Rabinovitch & Strega, 2004). This means that working at the organisation provides sex workers with the opportunity to gain experience in different workplaces and also ensures that the majority of staff have lived experiences of transitioning and are better able to assist other sex workers with similar goals (Benoit & Millar, 2001). The organisation also stresses the idea of choice, and provides holistic services for sex workers, including former sex workers, sex workers looking to leave the industry, and workers who want to remain in sex work (Rabinovitch & Strega, 2004, p. 152-153). As such, services encompass working conditions, education, health, and safety. The core programs and services offered include: Drop-In Centre/Wellness Clinic, Health Support and Outreach/Night Outreach, Men and Trans Outreach, Housing and Community Support, Violence Prevention & Response, 'Bad Date & Aggressor' Sheet, Small Business Training Program, Indoor Workers Dinner and Education Group, The Jannit Rabinovitch Memorial Scholarship, and Public Education (Peers Victoria Resources Society, 2014b).

#### Programs

The principal transitioning-related services provided by Peers Victoria includes the Small Business Training Program and the Jannit Rabinovitch Memorial Scholarship. The Small Business Training

<sup>13</sup> Peers Victoria is not a peer-only organisation. The organisation emphasises the importance of experiential and non-experiential perspectives working in collaboration and while the organisation employs a mix of peers and non-peers, decision-making positions are reserved for peers exclusively (Rabinovitch & Lewis, 2001, p. 14).

Program runs for approximately five hours per week over the course of five months. Program content includes planning a social enterprise; sales and marketing; developing a business plan; addressing maths anxiety; budgeting and bookkeeping; credit and debt; taxes; and preparing for retirement. After completing the program graduates have a current resume and a personal business plan that they can use to apply for a community micro loan<sup>14</sup> as well as an understanding of how to plan a social enterprise (Peers Victoria Resources Society, 2014b). The Jannit Rabinovitch Memorial Scholarship was initiated in 2016 and is named after one of the founders of Peers Victoria. It is a scholarship aimed at sex workers pursuing education and/or vocational training (Peers Victoria Resources Society, 2014b).

### Key Points

- Grassroots organisation; designed and developed by sex workers.
- Guided by the principal of 'choice' meaning that the needs of all sex-workers are considered in the design and development of programs and services offered by the organisation. This includes current and former sex workers as well as sex workers looking to leave the industry.
- The organisation has developed strategic employment policies to ensure a power balance is maintained between experiential and non-experiential employees. Positions of greater influence and carrying higher decision-making responsibilities are reserved for experiential staff only. Mobility from the sex industry to employee/volunteer/intern at Peers Victoria is regarded as a valuable mode of transitioning from sex work to other forms of work.
- Provision of scholarships to sex workers exploring educational/vocational opportunities.
- A training program that builds skills/knowledge that can be used internal or external to the sex industry; thus, appealing to people who want to leave sex work and workers wanting to advance within the sex industry.

#### 5.2.2.4 Case study four: Support for Leaving Prostitution Project: The DIWA Project, The Opera Project & The P.I.N.K. Project, Germany

##### Background

The Support for Leaving Prostitution Project was a regionally-centred transitioning project in Germany commissioned for a five-year period (2009-2014) by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (Steffan et al., 2015). The project's aims were to develop, and later evaluate, regionally-focussed transitioning programs in three locations in Germany: Berlin, Nuremberg and the Freiburg/Kehl region. These locations were meant to act as models for rolling out the program to other locations with similar characteristics and demographics. In addition to developing and evaluating three programs, the programs were designed to build and enhance relationships with relevant employment/job training agencies to ensure the transitioning services offered were supported with the relevant expertise and resources (Steffan et al., 2015).

Through the Support for Leaving Prostitution Project, three transitioning programs were developed: The DIWA Project (Berlin), The Opera Project (Nuremberg), and the P.I.N.K. Project (Freiburg/Kehl). Each project involved collaboration with other agencies. The DIWA Project involved collaboration between Hydra e.V. (a local sex worker organisation) and Goldnetz e.V. (a job training centre). Hydra e.V. provided psycho-social counselling services to sex workers, whilst Goldnetz e.V. focused on employment related services. The Opera Project involved collaboration with the Cassandra Centre, permitting Opera to focus on employment related support while Cassandra e.V. provided welfare support services for relevant clients. The P.I.N.K. project collaborated with 'Fit for Work' and Diakonisches Werk (a Protestant aid organisation providing a range of social welfare services) in the delivery of its New Start program.

<sup>14</sup> For example, graduates can apply for a small business loan with Community Micro Lending, which is a non-profit society that connects local lenders who want to strengthen the fabric of the local economy with local borrowers who are unable to access credit from a bank or credit union. For more on this local scheme see: <http://www.communitymicrolending.ca/>

## Programs

Program specifics unfortunately were not publicly available in the English language, and thus the descriptions of the programs are incomplete. It is unclear whether the projects still operate in the way they are depicted in Steffan and colleagues report (2015). Information is included which could be captured from the report and varied websites as well as data from an interview with Hydra e.V.

### *P.I.N.K. Project (Freiburg/Kehl)*

P.I.N.K. offered a case management and ‘coaching’ program for sex workers called New Start in the Freiburg/Kehl region. The program focused on workers who wanted to explore other employment options within or outside of the sex industry (P.I.N.K., n.d.). There is limited information regarding eligibility, however, it appears that female sex workers were the target group. P.I.N.K. is the only project in Germany that operates in a trans-border context, which necessitated cooperation with France. Little detail is provided about the mechanics of this cooperation.

### *The DIWA Project (Berlin)<sup>15</sup>*

Working with Hydra e.V. and Goldnetz e.V enabled the DIWA project to separate case management tasks (social welfare-oriented tasks versus employment/education-oriented tasks) and reach a diffuse urban sex worker population.<sup>16</sup> Hydra e.V. (a local sex worker organisation) provided psycho-social counselling services to sex workers, while Goldnetz (a job training centre) assisted with employment related services (Steffan et al., 2015). DIWA-Berlin also developed their own vocational training courses for sex workers.

Through Hydra e.V.’s involvement in the DIWA project, the transitioning program considered issues surrounding terminology and the ideological framing of transitioning programs. The program grappled with the use of the German-language term *aussteig* which means ‘exiting’ (as in to exit, withdraw from, opt or phase out of something) but in some instances can have the dual meaning of ‘to go in’ and ‘to go out’. After considerable debate, the DIWA project and Hydra e.V. eventually settled on *neuorientierung* (reorientation). By working in collaboration with a sex worker organisation, the transitioning program was framed around understanding the centrality of addressing the stigmatisation of sex work and taking an anti-stigma approach as well as recognition of the skills involved in sex work. Because of this approach, a central component of the program was shaped around the idea that having a good induction into sex work was key to a person’s ability to change jobs within the sector or leave the industry. The program took an inclusive and holistic approach and operated from an understanding of duality/dual careers in sex work, in that, sex work was integrated with other work or study, which was supported within the program. This meant that sex workers were not forced to leave sex work and ‘exiting’ the industry was not an aim of the program. In addition, reorientation workshops offered as part of the program also included upskilling in sex work to support people who wanted to change jobs within the industry.

### *The Opera Project (Nuremberg)*

The Opera project is responsible for providing employment, training and education support, whilst the Cassandra Centre retains responsibility for the delivery of social welfare related services. A social space for clients was also established at Opera’s site. It is unclear from the available information in English as to whether Opera is still in operation.

## Key Points

- Regionally-focused projects operating from a sex work-as-work framework and adapting to their local sex worker demographics. Programs are tailored to meet the unique needs of sex workers in each regional area. All projects stress the importance and value of collaboration—

<sup>15</sup> The DIWA case study was compiled from an interview with Hydra e.V. and information available on the project website and varied reports (e.g. Steffan et al., 2015).

<sup>16</sup> Hydra e.V. was the first autonomous sex worker organisation in Germany. It was formed in 1980 and has been running a counselling centre for sex workers since 1985. The centre is supported by the city of Berlin, and for more on the organisation see, <http://www.nswp.org/members/europe/hydra-ev-germany>

particularly with job/employment/work placement agencies.

- All three projects maintained separate provision of psycho-social/social welfare services and employment/education related services. For example, the DIWA Project involved provision of employment/education related services by Goldnetz (an employment agency), while Hydra e.V., a peer and non-peer counselling centre for sex workers, provided psycho-social services. This separation may be of use as it allows the delivery of services within specialised fields and this may be one way to meet sex workers' diverse needs and address funding constraints. The programs also offer a model for delivering services on a regional basis.

### 5.3 Transitioning needs: Provision of services to sex workers

As Table 2 on the barriers to leaving sex work highlights, there is no clear distinction between services specific to the needs of workers seeking to transition from the sex industry and the more general needs of sex workers. The requirement that sex workers be seeking to leave or reduce their hours worked in the sex industry in order to access these services can create a barrier of access to services for some sex workers. For example, an evaluation of a Melbourne-based program highlighted how some sex workers may not be ready to consider transitioning until more pressing needs (e.g. housing) are met (Resolve Community Consulting & RhED, 2012).

The transitioning literature highlights a number of services that may be required for workers seeking to leave the sex industry. This includes housing, substance use, mental and physical health, education and employment, financial, and legal services (Ouspenski, 2014). Each of these services are discussed in this section. People seeking assistance to transition from the sex industry may not require all of these services and transitioning service providers must take care not to offer support that is inappropriate or suitable for their individual client. It is important for services to take into consideration all aspects of a sex worker's health and sociocultural context and address any issues they may face in an appropriate manner. As such, community health approaches with holistic services and abilities to refer and connect with a wide range of services are favoured. It is essential for any service geared toward sex workers to be non-judgemental, as sex workers disengage from services when they feel stigmatised by those services, which can lead to increased disadvantage. It is also important for services to be tailored to individual needs and flexibly delivered; for example, 'outpatient or drop-in drug services must be open late hours, not punish clients for continued use or inability to adhere to strict and inflexible rules like attendance requirements or discharge for missed appointments' (Ouspenski, 2014, p. 44). Given that sex workers tend to work irregular hours, offering services later in the day and evening is important (Benoit & Millar, 2001; El-Hayek et al., 2011; Koostra, 2010). Shift work is also becoming increasingly common in today's workforce, and even more with the introduction of the gig economy. This means that it is becoming quite difficult for most workers to make appointments that are only scheduled between Monday-Friday and the hours of 9-5. The scheduling of services between these hours may be more for the comfort of the service provider and not necessarily the consumer.

#### 5.3.1 Housing

Without access to safe, supportive, stable, and affordable housing, it is not possible for sex workers to start engaging in transitioning. If this need is not already met, it should be given priority by any organisation providing transitioning assistance (Benoit & Millar, 2001; Mayhew & Mossman, 2007; Ouspenski, 2014; UK NSWP, 2008a, Koostra, 2010). Several suggestions relating to accessing housing are made in the Ouspenski (2014) report. One suggestion is that transitioning programs can facilitate access to housing by advocating for sex workers to be considered a high priority group for organisations providing housing services:

sex workers have called for an urgent increase in safe and appropriate housing, such as supported housing and transitional housing. Other studies have supported this and went further to indicate that sex work-only housing could be beneficial and aid in alleviating impacts of violence against sex workers. Another study demonstrated that women who engage in sex work require long-term housing that is women-centred, staffed by women, and free from arbitrary evictions and strict guest policies. Finally, women identified that 24/7 drop-ins and/or shelters are also urgently needed with some suggesting the removal of shelter curfew policies



to be replaced with a model which asks for women to check in once every 24 hours. (Ouspenski, 2014, p. 30)

Ouspenski (2014) also notes that while it is generally the case (or assumed to be) that indoor sex workers have access to housing, they may face housing instability or insecurity where their work is illegal, or for other reasons, and the report also discusses the challenges migrant workers can face in being unfamiliar with how housing operates or barriers to finance etc.

As the UK NSWP (2008a, p. 9) good practice guidance notes, a range of crisis accommodation needs to be available to meet client needs and some crisis accommodation needs to be women only. Similar to Ouspenski, they also suggest sex workers need to be recognised as a priority group in local housing and homelessness strategies. Additionally, working in collaboration with transitioning services means that workers from local housing service providers can visit drop-in sessions and partnerships can also include outreach to homeless populations and awareness training for homeless and housing departments and organisations. Further adding to these possibilities, the UK NSWP also note that if there is scope in a transitioning program, an in-house specialist housing worker can also offer referrals to crisis accommodation and assist in sustaining more longer-term tenancy arrangements (UK NSWP, 2008a, p. 11).

### 5.3.2 Alcohol and other drugs

As with housing, assistance with substance use is considered a priority need within the literature (Mayhew & Mossman, 2007; Ouspenski, 2014). Fast tracking access to substance use services for sex workers and ensuring that their partners can access these services at the same time, were considered important in enabling transition from the sex industry (Dalla, 2006; Mayhew & Mossman, 2007; Ouspenski, 2014). Mayhew and Mossman (2007) note that treatment is more likely to be successful if it is entered into voluntarily; the treatment takes an holistic approach and focuses on all the client's needs; and features dedicated project support. They also suggest that points of crisis can be used to engage sex workers in drug treatment programs, though it should be noted that there is a risk of coercion here. Benoit and Millar (2001) note that harm reduction services are essential for sex workers who use substances. Their report focuses on how substance use can result in complex health needs, which is discussed in greater detail below.

Services should offer access to comprehensive, harm reduction drug treatment programs, which include a range of drug service options (UK NSWP, 2008a, p. 9). Ideally, qualified drug workers and prescribing doctors would be based within the program and could offer varied services. This includes immediate prescribing (not appointment based), which, as UK NSWP suggest could act as harm minimisation and engagement along with more structured, therapeutic work and referrals into residential rehabilitation (UK NSWP, 2008a, p. 9). Partnerships could be developed with local drug agencies (including secondments) and awareness training can be provided to drug workers and agencies and drug departments (UK NSWP, 2008a, p. 9).

### 5.3.3 Mental health

According to Hedin and Månsson (2004) accessing psychotherapy helped 'exited prostitutes' deal with the trauma associated with sex work (and they argue, the trauma that led women to the sex industry). However, when accessing services, the women in their study reported experiencing harassment, particularly from male professionals. This included 'john-like' behaviour from male professionals and a general lack of knowledge about sex work, which shows little evidence of awareness training being carried out with mental health professionals (Hedin & Månsson, 2004, p. 231). Sex workers experiencing this kind of harassment in treatment settings is a cause for concern and is an example of unethical and unprofessional behaviour that may need to be addressed in any transitioning program.

Bindel and colleagues (2012) suggest that specialist support be provided to women who have experienced trauma and/or have been victims of violence. This leads them to call for consideration of funding of a specialised mental health care provision service for sex workers. While access to formal mental health services is essential, sex workers may face other issues that require professional assistance (e.g. counselling) without the need for psychiatric involvement. These issues



include low self-esteem, feelings of guilt and identity formation/renegotiation as well as dealing with life changes (see also, Ouspenski, 2014, p. 45). Transitioning programs need to provide access to appropriate mental health services for sex workers dealing with low self-esteem and other psychosocial issues stemming from the stigma attached to sex work.

As the UK NSWP recommends, transitioning services can include high quality crisis counselling services delivered on a drop-in basis as well as more structured appointments (UK NSWP, 2008a, p. 13). These services need to be provided by a qualified mental health professional with specialisation in trauma and abuse. The UK NSWP (2008a, p. 13) also suggests developing care plans with local mental health crisis teams to make sure the service can respond to severe mental health issues. Partnerships can be developed to facilitate referrals into more long-term and specialised counselling, and representatives can offer support to clients when dealing with mental health services (UK NSWP, 2008a, p. 13).

### 5.3.4 Education & employment

According to Ouspenski:

access to education and employment by sex workers is limited for a variety of reasons. While stigma is a [key reason], some sex workers reported having criminal convictions that prevented them from transitioning out was an issue, as well as lack of knowledge surrounding resumé preparation and interview skills, and gaps in resumé while engaging in sex work. Literature suggests that sex work agencies providing transitioning support could develop service agreements or contracts with employment training agencies and adult learning organizations to develop collaborative relationships and increase access. Partnerships with local businesses could also be established to provide training and support to those who are trying to exit sex work. (Ouspenski, 2014, p. 46)

While the idea of establishing links with local businesses may seem sound, in reality, this could be a problematic model of service delivery if the idea of the program is to create an individually tailored service, and instead may end up creating dependency. There are also a limited range of local businesses likely to be partnered with, and many options tend to focus on hospitality work or the crafts/handicrafts industries. Often, these jobs do not pay an income comparable to that earned by some in sex work and may not be viable economic alternatives for some sex workers. Mahyew and Mossman (2007) also identify education, training, and employment as important steps in helping sex workers to transition. They suggest fast-tracking access to training and employment services; providing specialist support and assessment; and providing employment opportunities that match sex workers' skills and interests. They note that other issues that might be a barrier to employment need to be dealt with prior to engaging in education or training (Mahyew & Mossman, 2007, p. 33).

UK NSWP (2008a, p. 10) suggest making agreements with local employment agencies that allow for an agency to be based within the transitioning project for a minimum of one session a week. They also note that as clients will be starting at different entry points, some may not be ready for formal, structured skills-building programs. They also recommend keeping records of attendance and achievements and collating these as part of a personal development file. These methods may gradually introduce clients to more formal training opportunities and increases in capacity, skills and confidence-building. UK NSWP also suggest running awareness-raising workshops with local employers, organisations and employment agencies (UK NSWP, 2008a, p. 10).

### 5.3.5 Financial

Some sex workers have debts or other financial difficulties to manage. Ouspenski (2014) argues that providing financial management assistance through a transitioning program is essential. UK NSWP (2008a, p. 14) suggest having a debt counsellor based in drop-in sessions at least once a week, and that the counsellor could also support sex workers with creditors and help work out budgeting plans. The importance of having the counsellor attend weekly is that budgets can be regularly reviewed and adjusted accordingly (UK NSWP, 2008a, p. 14). Drop-in sessions could also be held by Centrelink/benefits advisors so advice about entitlements and applications for government benefits can be completed with clients in sex worker-friendly environments. It is important for program staff

to develop good working relationships and partnerships with local benefit offices, welfare rights advisors and debt advice services and this will help program staff in making referrals to services (UK NSWP, 2008a, p. 14). In addition, staff can have links into local credit unions and loans/saving schemes that offer access to low interest loans for people on low incomes, and awareness-raising workshops with local financial services and agencies are essential (UK NSWP, 2008a, p. 14).

### 5.3.6 Legal services

Mayhew and Mossman (2007, p. 26) speak at some length about legal issues, specifically that within criminalised contexts police are caught in a bind of directives persecuting sex workers (crackdowns, zero tolerance) and policy stating they are meant to help sex workers. In their report they discuss how criminalising sex work makes it difficult for sex workers to transition out of the industry and how this was a key factor in New Zealand's decision to decriminalise. As Ouspenski (2014, p. 47) highlights some sex workers face legal barriers to transitioning, and for some this is because of the criminalised nature of sex work. The provision of anonymous legal advice is essential in transitioning programs. In addition to this, transitioning programs need to work with legal services and justice agencies for any criminal records pertaining to sex work to be expunged. In some cases, this needs to happen before a person can transition out of sex work with any degree of success. Ouspenski (2014, p. 47) also suggests that waiting times for processing criminal pardons (or full erasures/seals of records) need to be reduced as well as a waiver for fees associated with this process in order to facilitate easier transitions.

### 5.3.7 Stigma & discrimination

Benoit and Millar (2001, pp. viii-ix) raise a number of suggestions to help address the broader, structural issues that result in the marginalisation of sex workers. These include:

- educate the public about the reality of sex workers' lives;
- campaign for changes in policy and legislation to make sex work safer;
- provide sensitivity education and training for police and other criminal justice personnel on the dynamics of sex work across all venues;
- provide ready access to safe, stable, and affordable housing;
- provide ready access to appropriate and sensitive health and social service providers who are knowledgeable about the needs and concerns of sex workers;
- make available a continuum of services so that sex workers receive the care they need when they need it; and
- provide economic and political support for experience-based (peer) advocacy organisations.

It is essential for transitioning programs to engage in this work in order to reduce stigma and discrimination, identified in the literature and through interviews with peer and non-peer organisations as the biggest barrier sex workers face in transitioning. It is also essential in order to reduce the likelihood of transitioning programs compounding and further entrenching stigma.<sup>17</sup> In addition to addressing structural issues related to stigma and discrimination, transitioning programs will need to work with sex workers on a one-on-one and group basis, providing counselling and support to address internalised stigma and plans and strategies to deal with disclosure outside of the sex industry.

### 5.3.8 Multi-pronged engagement strategies through drop-in spaces & outreach

The development of a multi-pronged engagement strategy is both crucial and fundamental to effectively engaging with sex workers. The research on transitioning very clearly suggests the delivery of transitioning services through drop-in spaces and outreach (Kim et al., 2015; Sanders-McDonagh & Neville, 2012). This is of particular value and importance within an holistic transitioning program and as a method of engaging and developing rapport with 'hard-to-reach' groups in the sex industry. Furthermore, use of a multi-pronged engagement strategy in the context of a transitioning

<sup>17</sup> See the Technical and Background Paper for a fuller discussion of this point (Sandy, Meenagh, & Nes-Iadicola, 2019).

programs aids in the dissemination of information to service users and facilitates access to relevant services.

Multi-pronged engagement strategies include providing outreach and drop-in spaces. Findings from an evaluation on the Women's Open Space Project in the UK found that 'offering both outreach and drop-in services was the best way of engaging sex workers, and the services would be far less effective without this coordinated approach' (Sanders-McDonagh & Neville, 2012, p. 10). Additionally, employment of both outreach and drop-in services is of critical importance in engaging sex workers experiencing homelessness or young persons engaged in sex work. Black and Gronda (2011) found that the absence of drop-in spaces and outreach services acted as a barrier to engagement with marginalised populations, particularly so for young people and homeless persons. In the area of transitioning services, the absence of outreach and drop-in services has the potential to exclude the most marginalised and/or vulnerable sex workers and create a barrier to accessing support.

Drop-in centres serve a unique role in providing services for sex workers:

drop-in center services are often paired with outreach programs, but serve an important function that outreach services cannot: centers provide a safe place for sex workers to gather. A physical space for socializing, resting, and holding meetings can be crucially important for sex workers, particularly street-based or mobile workers, who may not have other safe venues to congregate. (Open Society Foundation, 2012, p. 3)

Sanders-McDonagh and Neville also reflect on how the stigma associated with sex work can work to impede access to services, and they suggest that drop in-spaces housed within sex worker organisations could counter this effect by providing a 'stigma-free' environment in which sex workers could 'feel comfortable and "normal"' (2012, p. 7).

Drop-in centres also provide practical amenities or features that can act as engagement tools such as shower and laundry facilities, tea/coffee and food, harm-reduction and safer sex supplies and access to computers and the internet (Open Society Foundation, 2012). The practical features that sex worker drop-in centres provide are indispensable for workers who may not have access to basic amenities on a regular or on-going basis, and this is particularly so for street-based, mobile and/or homeless sex workers (Kelaher et al., 2014; Open Society Foundation, 2012). Drop-in spaces can also be used to accommodate intermittent services in accordance with sex worker needs such as onsite legal counsel, mental health support, health services and workshops/training. Documenting incidences of violence or abuse that sex workers may experience are also enhanced through having drop-in spaces wherein sex workers can opportunistically and safely make the necessary reports and access support.

Drop-in spaces play a key role in engaging with sex workers more broadly within an organisation and reducing barriers to accessing services. These spaces are also integral to engaging with sex workers who may be interested in accessing transitioning services. The evaluation of the Women's Open Space Project found that 'drop-in was often the first place [sex workers] turned to for help and support in making life changes' (Sanders-McDonagh & Neville, 2012, p. 11). Transitioning out of sex work can be a significant and complex life change for some workers and the availability of drop-in centres can actually instil a sense of power, agency and choice for a person who may be thinking about transitioning and they may be more likely to ask about or engage in a transitioning program in a stigma-free, friendly and familiar environment.

The use of varied modes of outreach to initiate and sustain engagement with sex workers is seen as fundamental to the efficacy of programs for sex workers and part of holistic service provision (Benoit & Millar 2001; Hester & Westmarland, 2004; Mayhew & Mossman, 2007). Outreach is recognised as a crucial element of best practice in working with sex worker populations; facilitating the establishment and maintenance of positive working relationships between service providers and sex workers; comprehensive dissemination of program information to sex workers; providing external referrals; delivering harm reduction and safer sex materials; and responding to legal and safety concerns (Benoit & Millar 2001; Hester & Westmarland, 2004; Mayhew & Mossman, 2007; Ouspenski, 2014; UK NSWP, 2008b). Mayhew and Mossman describe outreach work with sex

workers as ‘that which, simply put, takes support to sex workers, rather than expecting them to access it themselves’ (2007, p. 29). In their report on models of best practice for transitioning programs, Mayhew and Mossman posit that outreach is not only ‘central to efforts made to support sex workers outside the context of exiting strategies’ but also ‘remains crucial for specific exiting strategies, since it maximises the chances of engaging with someone who might be considering exit and who needs extra reinforcement’ (2007, p. 29).

UK NSWP (2008b) describes five different types of outreach. Briefly, these are:

1. Detached: Outreach that takes place in external/public spaces such as street outreach and other outdoor sex environments.
2. Peripatetic: Outreach that occurs in indoor environments such as brothels, saunas, massage parlours, lap dancing venues and private clubs.
3. Satellite: Outreach ‘when one organisation is located within another ... for example, in prisons, day centres or GUM clinics’ (UK NSWP, 2008b, p. 4).
4. Domiciliary: Outreach outside sex work locations such as private residences, hospitals and prisons.
5. Internet: Netreach locations include chat forums, community websites and social media platforms.

Given that the experience of leaving sex work is considered a complex and non-linear process, outreach becomes a vital component in fostering sustainable engagement in a transitioning program and ensuring successful transitioning outcomes (however uniquely these are defined). The importance of building trust and rapport with service users is also paramount and the different modes of outreach described above are generally seen as effectual in establishing this (Hester & Westmarland, 2004). Furthermore, as Hester and Westmarland (2004) suggest, the use of outreach as an engagement strategy in transitioning programs also helps service providers better assess a client’s ‘readiness’ to engage in the program. Similar to drop-in spaces, outreach can help in providing access for more vulnerable and marginalised sex workers who may be interested in engaging in a transitioning program but may lack the means to initiate contact with a service provider.

## 5.4 What are the key elements of a program design based on promising practices?

Based on the literature review, stakeholder consultations and work undertaken on developing a framework for promising practices, the program needs to be operating from a rights-based framework that takes into account the voices and views of sex workers. The first step in this process is conducting a community needs assessment with sex workers and meaningfully involving sex workers in program design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Another key element is incorporating the idea of a career development program that focuses on transitions into, out of and within sex work. The overall goal of a career development program would be to support sex workers to make informed decisions based on the principle of free choice. This includes the decision to stay in sex work. Table 4 lists some of the program components mentioned above and the key elements of good practice identified by Koostra (2010) through their review of the transitioning literature. Koostra’s table has been supplemented with findings from the literature review and interviews with stakeholders as well as work on developing a tool for evaluating promising practices in transitioning programs (see, Sandy, Meenagh, & Nes-ladicola, 2019). These key elements for good practice in transitioning programs can help aid program design and service delivery and act as a stepping stone towards establishing promising practice in transitioning programs.



**Table 4: Key elements of good practices in a transitioning program for sex workers**

<b>Key elements of good practices</b>	
<b>Service providers</b>	Respectful attitude towards sex workers; support sex workers' choices including the decision to stay in sex work
	Address sex workers' strengths and not just the barriers they face (i.e. address strengths and barriers)
	Prioritise needs and concerns expressed by workers
	Support sex worker-led initiatives and interventions
	Recognise diversity among sex workers and adapt services accordingly: client-centred services rather than institution-centred
	Bottom-up program and project development (also offered over a longer-time frame and with direct involvement of sex workers at all stages)
	Leaving sex work is a gradual process: provide a continuum of services and be mindful and respectful of the cyclical nature, duality and sex-work-maybe statuses (heterogeneity in experiences, outcomes and worker desires)
	Employ specialist professionals (psychologists, medical doctors, social workers etc. but also people specialising in financial management, education and retraining)
	Access to program without any conditions (workers are not required/forced to leave sex work – recognise that a transitioning program can also offer additional income/way to address burnout and not just a replacement for sex work)
	Drop-in centres in which transitioning is just one of the many options available
	Act as a broker for sex workers to help them access mainstream services
	Provide job opportunities for sex workers, including peer education and other paid volunteer work
	Provide high quality workload supervision to ensure staff retention and avoid burnout
Undertake program evaluation and ensure results are made available to sex workers and the wider community – this is a cornerstone in establishing an evidence base for promising practice	
<b>Sex workers</b>	Involvement in all levels of project development, implementation and evaluation
	Free choice: have voice and agency to make their own informed decisions
	Training (leadership and community development)
<b>Program content</b>	Holistic services (transitioning as one of the services and options available, not the main goal)
	Program goal: support sex workers to make informed decisions (not 'exiting' as goal)
	Provide outreach and netreach to maximise access to sex workers
	Include career development in program – this means career development within and outside the industry (focus on skills training in sex work as well as retraining and education, alternative work)
	Use personal development plans as a starting point (tailor service delivery) and to develop tailor-made projects/interventions – assess strengths and needs on three levels: personal, professional and practical
	Multidisciplinary approach and partnerships: a) education, vocational skills training, business skills training; b) social activities (self-esteem building and development of social support networks); c) practical support (housing, financial literacy, debts); d) employment strategies (strengths assessment, job interview training, building CVs, contacts with employers, providing opportunities for voluntary work or gain experience in paid voluntary work and peer education); e) medical and mental health services
	Intensive one-on-one coaching (and intensive case management for workers who need this)
	High-quality skills training: this will lead to an increase in self-esteem and viable employment opportunities
	Access to safe housing
	Childcare and parenting support during retraining

	Peer-learning and group work (encourages shared learning and the chance to exchange experiences and can help build a new social network)
	After-care on program completion
<b>Environment</b>	Take a value chain approach: use close co-operation and partnerships with key organisations (e.g. employment agencies, local employers, local benefit offices; housing department; housing providers and refuges; medical and mental health service providers; drug treatment centres)
	Advocacy to reduce stigma and discrimination
	Collaborate to address regulatory and legislative barriers to transitioning
	Support the decriminalisation of sex work
<b>Program sustainability</b>	Sustainable funding is necessary as transitioning is a gradual process
	Political commitment to a rights-based approach towards sex work, sex workers and transitioning

Source: Koostra, 2010 and interview data.

## 6 Recommendations

The programs and program frameworks discussed in this report draw out some of the more complex issues and understandings of power relations shaping research and programming with sex workers. In some of the research and transitioning literature, sex workers are seen as ‘at risk’ either from themselves and/or adults; ‘problems’ that need to be managed or people who are incapable of leaving sex work and in need of rescue. What this means is that in some transitioning programs and research, sex workers become the passive objects of study and targets for intervention by non-sex workers who are seen to have a better understanding of what sex workers need, which feeds into a non-sex worker-centred methodology. However, a few of the more innovative transitioning programs reviewed in this research present a more critical perspective, and clearly see sex workers as social agents and active meaning makers in their lives, albeit on differing scales of inclusion. The unique approach taken in these transitioning programs means that they do not see sex workers as passive recipients of programs designed by non-sex workers – rather, sex workers are acknowledged as the experts on and in their lives and central to a sex worker-centred methodology in program development and implementation. This approach is in line with best practice in the provision of services for sex workers (UNAIDS, 2012) and needs to be an overriding principle for the design of transitioning programs. It is also a key factor guiding the recommendations coming out of this review. The recommendations are based on a review of the literature, findings from interviews with stakeholders and work undertaken on developing a framework for promising practices in transition programs for sex workers.<sup>18</sup>

### 6.1 Recommendation 1: What can a transitioning service do?

A transitioning program can provide support for sex workers seeking to access government support services or other support systems; provide financial literacy services, legal advocacy services, (particularly around expunging criminal records related to sex work activities), counselling and therapeutic and psycho/social support, assistance with job service agencies and job searching, housing assistance, assistance in accessing drug and/or alcohol treatment programs, family violence support programs or medical and other health programs (e.g. emergency dental programs etc.), among a range of other supports that are required to address sex workers’ diverse needs (including long and short term and immediate crisis care needs).

Transitioning services can be offered through a blend of case management, peer-learning and community-based group approaches in order to support sex workers’ diverse needs and modes of engagement. Counselling and therapy can be provided to address internal stigma and community campaigns and advocacy can help break down and address external stigma. A transitioning service can also provide assistance and support with finding alternate employment, resumes, addressing selection criteria etc., provide relevant skills training as well as playing a crucial role in providing paid

<sup>18</sup> In developing these recommendations, the key literature drawn from includes Benoit and Millar, 2001; Bindel et al., 2012; Koostra, 2010; Mayhew and Mossman, 2007; Ouspenski, 2014; UK NSW, 2008a.

volunteering opportunities for sex workers. A transitioning service can also provide referrals to sex-worker friendly services and de-stigmatisation training to other service providers.

Transitioning services need to be offered via effective engagement modes, and this includes an engagement strategy that incorporates drop-in spaces, outreach and netreach. A multi-pronged engagement strategy is crucial to program sustainability and success. It is also fundamental to transitioning services effectively engaging with marginalised sex workers. Transitioning services need to be delivered through varying forms of outreach and netreach and the provision of drop-in spaces is central to ensuring program success.

## **6.2 Recommendation 2: Carry out a community needs assessment**

A transitioning program needs to reflect sex workers needs and priorities. In order to address this, there is a need to undertake broad consultation with Victorian sex workers that can inform program development. Consultation should be ongoing in the form of regular needs assessment and not just a one-off activity.

A transitioning program needs to prioritise the needs and concerns expressed by sex workers themselves. This is essential in developing a program that reflects sex workers' priorities. While transitioning services are offered by diverse service providers in Melbourne, the review did not find evidence of a needs assessment being carried out with sex workers. However, it may be that this information is not publicly available. The original consultation undertaken by the Ministerial Advisory Committee, which seems to have informed the design of some Victorian-based programs, did not include direct consultation with sex workers. Although the consultations undertaken by the Ministerial Advisory Committee included organisations providing services to sex workers (e.g. RhED, Project Respect, Gatehouse, Salvation Army), given the contentions in this area of service provision, these views should not be taken as a proxy for carrying out a needs assessment (or sex workers' own voices and views). During stakeholder interviews there was anecdotal evidence shared that suggests a need for transitioning services, and this could be validated through carrying out a needs assessment. It is recommended that broad cross-sectoral consultation be undertaken with sex workers in Victoria to a) determine program need; b) aid in shaping program content; and c) effective modes of delivery.

## **6.3 Recommendation 3: Provide peer support**

The review has highlighted that transition services should include peers for it to be considered as emerging practice. As Ouspenski highlights, 'direct support from peer workers who have lived experience with sex work and thus know first-hand some of the issues many sex workers face was identified by best practice reports and sex worker led research as gold standard' (2014, p. 50 see also WHO, 2013). The employment of peers who reflect client backgrounds (racial/sexual identity/work sector as well as lived experience (e.g. people who use drugs and/or are living with a mental illness) is also essential.

It is recommended that the transitioning program be developed bottom-up over a period of time with the direct involvement of sex workers in all stages. Further, it is recommended that the program support sex worker-led initiatives and interventions.

## **6.4 Recommendation 4: Adopt a 'career transitions/career development' framework**

Transitioning programs need to recognise the diversity of experiences in transitioning and the varied strategies sex workers may use to facilitate transitions and the complex nature of this. It is recommended the program incorporates the concepts of 'duality', 'sexiting' and 'yo-yoing'. Remaining flexible in service provision is key, and adopting a program goal of supporting sex workers to make informed decisions and not 'exiting' the industry is central to flexibility.

It is recommended that transitioning programs support sex workers choices, including the choice to remain in sex work.

It is recommended that a coherent theory base be developed, if one is not already in place. The review has highlighted that the program be theory-based and informed by a theory of change that clearly identifies the activities that will lead short and long-term outcomes and how these are anticipated to effect change. A basis in theory is essential for the program to be considered as best and/or promising practice. It is recommended that an integrated model be adapted by building upon the UK NSWP Cycles of Change model or Baker and colleagues Integration model after evaluation by Victorian sex workers themselves. These models can also be adapted through the inclusion of Sanders and Bowen's typologies and this can address the gaps identified in these models (i.e. incorporating 'duality', 'sexiting' and 'yo-yoing').

## 6.5 Recommendation 5: Adopt multiple modalities in service provision

It is recommended that transitioning programs be developed based on long- and short-term programmatic focuses and consider utilising community health-based and peer-learning approaches and workshops alongside a case management approach.

The program needs to develop a fast response mechanism for people who want to leave sex work in a time of crisis. Having a nurse or social worker with mental health and/or staff with alcohol and other drugs specialisation will be essential in providing a fast-tracked service (for primary care and counselling) and fast-tracked access to other services.

It is also recommended that the transitioning program adopt a multidisciplinary approach in program contents. This includes:

- Education, vocational skills training and business skills training.
- Employment strategies can consist of: job interview training; writing and building CVs; strengths assessment and recognition of skills in sex work; providing opportunities for paid voluntary work; providing paid employment as peer educators/peer workers; providing contacts with employers and job service agencies.
- Practical support (housing, debts, financial literacy skills).
- Medical and mental health services.
- Social activities (development of social support networks, self-esteem building).

It is also recommended that the transitioning program consider value-chains or approaches similar to Canada's Transitions Consortium. The program does not need to offer all of these services, and given funding constraints could not be expected to meet the diversity of needs. Close co-operation with key organisations involved in this area and de-stigmatisation training with service providers will help ensure the program is able to meet sex workers' diverse needs. This includes working closely with employment agencies, job service providers, education providers, local employers, housing departments and agencies, crisis services, refuges, medical and mental health service providers, drug treatment centres, benefit offices and sex worker organisations. A Working Party and Steering Committee can aid in developing an overarching program framework, help guide the work, broker partnerships and negotiate Memoranda of Understanding and sex worker representation on these committees or working parties is essential.

## 6.6 Recommendation 6: Provide holistic services

A transitioning program needs to offer a diverse range of services and activities that respond to sex workers' needs, and this needs to be placed within a framework of sex work as work. A strict requirement stipulating sex workers need to be seeking to leave or reducing their hours worked in the sex industry in order to access services can create a barrier of access to services for some sex workers. For some people, they may not be able to consider leaving sex work until more pressing needs (e.g. housing) are met, while for others once these needs are met, they may find that they wish to stay in sex work or work in different ways (e.g. dual careers).

It is recommended that transitioning services be provided as part of generalist support services. Transitioning services can be offered as one of the options available, but it is recommended that 'exiting' the industry or leaving sex work should not be the main goal of the program as this should be supporting sex workers choices.

## **6.7 Recommendation 7: Collaborate with the government and other services**

Transitioning programs can collaborate with the government when developing sex worker specific services. This collaboration could include the co-location of GPs at sex work agencies and detox facilities (e.g. detox beds and second stage recovery support, and partners need to be able to access these services at the same time). Collaboration could be sought in terms of a mental health and substance use recovery centre that is sex worker specific or staffed by non-judgemental, experiential and professional staff.

A transitioning program could collaborate on the provision of emergency housing loans for sex workers that are at risk of homelessness, and ensuring the government commits to a rights-based approach in transitioning programs and services.

The program can collaborate with government to address regulatory and legislative barriers to transitioning. It is recommended that transitioning programs support the decriminalisation of sex work. The research has shown that one of the biggest challenges to leaving sex work is the stigma that sex workers face. Criminalisation of sex work and legalisation with accompanying criminal penalties entrenches stigma and discrimination. Decriminalisation is a necessary step in breaking down the stigmatisation and marginalisation of sex workers in Victoria and in helping to facilitate transitions. The global evidence suggests that decriminalisation reduces risks to sex workers' health and safety and in 2006 UNAIDS and the UN High Commissioner of Human Rights recommended decriminalisation to protect sex workers' human rights and health (Beyrer et al., 2015; Das & Horton, 2015; Decker et al. 215; Donovan et al. 2012; Fawkes, 2014; Kim, 2015; OHCHR & UNAIDS, 2006; UNAIDS, 2012). In 2016, Amnesty International recommended decriminalisation of all aspects of consensual adult sex work, with this being 'grounded in the principles of harm reduction, gender equality, recognition of the personal agency of sex workers, and general international human rights principles' (2016, p. 2). In addition to Amnesty International, Decker and colleagues document that the UNDP Asia-Pacific (Godwin, 2012), Global Commission on HIV and the Law (2012) and UN Special Rapporteur on Health and Human Rights (UN, 2010) have all recommended the decriminalisation of sex work. Policy reform through decriminalisation could also be seen as a central feature of best practice in transitioning programs, as discussed in the Technical and Background Paper. It is recommended that transitioning programs support decriminalisation in order to facilitate transitions and address the legal and other barriers sex workers face.

In collaborating with government, this work could also be extended to include the erasure of criminal records. This is essential in allowing successful transitions for workers who want to leave sex work or engage in dual careers to gain employment. A transitioning program can work with government to reduce waiting times for this process and for fees to be waived for sex workers.

It is recommended that transitioning programs collaborate with governments to facilitate ongoing recognition that leaving sex work is a gradual process and sustainable funding is necessary for the work.

## **6.8 Recommendation 8: Develop specialised staffing profiles**

As highlighted by Ouspenski (2014, pp. 57-61) a transitioning program can develop a number of specialised staffing profiles to support program activities. Specialised staffing profiles could include the hiring of a GP to provide methadone scripts and other basic health services for sex workers. A mental health and substance use specialist can be located in-house allowing assessments to be undertaken and fast-tracking access to services and crisis counselling (drop-in and/or outreach basis). Other specialised staffing roles include:



- a) a housing and financial officer: the person in this role can provide assistance to sex workers who need access to housing and/or finances.
- b) an employment and education officer: this role can help in establishing strong partnerships with employment training agencies and educational institutions and agencies (higher education and vocational education) to facilitate access by sex workers. The officer could also play a key role in awareness raising, promoting sex worker employment and providing workshops (e.g. how to write a resume/answering selection criteria/job interview skills/searching for jobs etc.). They could also negotiate partnerships with educational institutions that will allow the training to be externally recognised. For example, a Transitioning Worker Certificate (Certificate III or IV qualification developed by partnering with higher education institutions) that can build capacity in the sector and help ensure that peer workers (and other staff) are supported through the transitioning program's professional development.
- c) transitioning liaison officers: this role could provide case management services. Staff need to have a manageable number of clients, and liaison officers need to be experiential and representative of diversity in the sector and differing experiences of marginality (e.g. young people, trans and gender diverse, male, migrant and Indigenous workers).
- d) peer support workers: a lived experience of sex work is essential for these roles and peer support workers could also have shared experiences of varied program clients (e.g. living with a mental illness, people who use drugs, migrant workers, trans and gender diverse and male sex workers and so on). Peer support workers can also deliver de-stigmatisation and awareness training for collaborating service providers (e.g. job service agencies, benefit offices/Centrelink, housing services and refugees, mental health and alcohol and drug treatment providers and education providers). Working in partnership with education providers and the employment and education officer, peer-led de-stigmatisation training could be expanded into the educational sectors (e.g. training with medical students, nursing students, criminal justice students, social work students and so on).

## **6.9 Recommendation 9: Develop a community awareness-raising campaign targeting Victorian workplaces and educational institutions.**

This review has identified that community attitudes towards sex workers are a significant barrier to transitioning. There is a need to develop and implement a community awareness-raising campaign, with a specific call to action directed at workplace and organisational leaders. Ideally, this campaign could highlight the need for and benefits of organisational change and the positive impact of this in creating healthy workplaces for current and former sex workers, success in transitioning and changing community attitudes towards sex work and sex workers. This work could also be undertaken as part of a campaign to support the decriminalisation of sex work, as recommended above. This community awareness work could involve program partners and service providers (e.g. homelessness groups, sexual assault and family service providers (e.g. Victorian Centres Against Sexual Assault, Safe Steps, Victoria Legal Aid, Community Legal Centres and research and advocacy bodies like ANROWS and Our Watch – once de-stigmatisation training has been provided).

It is recommended that transitioning programs develop and implement community awareness-raising campaigns in collaboration with Victorian sex workers.

## **6.10 Recommendation 10: Support research with sex workers on transitioning**

Cross-cultural comparative research on sex workers' experiences of transitioning is needed. There is little research with diverse groups of workers, and almost none with trans and gender diverse workers and male workers. The small body of research with off-street female sex workers has shown some commonalities but also differences with street-based sex workers. More research is needed

in order to better understand transitioning and the diversity of experiences, needs and work practices. This research can help inform policy design, government funding and advocacy and, with the current emphasis on transitioning programs and recent funding boosts in this sector, it is timely and necessary.

## 7 Conclusion

This report has highlighted key areas and provided recommendations for program design and frameworks as well as future directions and identified what promising practice might look like in transitioning programs. It defines and discusses key terminology and approaches in transitioning programs for sex workers, including understandings of 'exiting', transitioning and career development and provides detail on programs and models designed to respond to transitioning. The report has detailed what it means to shift focus in transitioning programming and engage in the work using a rights-based framework and an understanding of sex work as *work*. It has outlined what promising practice might look like, and provided examples from an analysis of transitioning programs, nationally and internationally, all of which gives a rich context for examining approaches in the sector and consideration of promising practices.

The case studies described in this report provide evidence of promising practice and other key themes from the stakeholder interviews, including the need to query 'exiting' and the idea carried in the term that sex work is something that needs to be escaped as well as the in/out binary shaping understandings of sex work and transitioning. The report also questions the framing of sex work as dangerous and a harmful activity that people are trapped in, prevalent in some 'exiting' research. As the report documents, while this may be the case for some people, it is not an experience shared by all sex workers, and any well-designed program needs to address workers' diverse needs and experiences. The report also argues that transitioning needs to be understood as a non-linear process and tries to encourage understanding sex work as something a person does not have to be 'in' or 'out' of. The report has attempted to develop a broader understanding of transitioning in terms of career development and suggests a programmatic focus beyond 'exiting' sex work. It is hoped that this approach can help in facilitating a shift in transitioning programming to assisting a person's entry into a new occupation or upskilling as part of career progression. This would help bring sex work transitioning programming in line with transitioning programming elsewhere and reduce the focus on getting people out of sex work from 'exiting' frameworks. The idea of career development allows transitioning programs to focus on mobility and upskilling within the industry, supporting workers when they start sex work or maintaining dual careers as a way to work in the industry and avoid burn out, while simultaneously addressing the needs of workers who want to leave the industry. It is a framework based on free choice and one that recognises the complexity of transitioning. It takes the approach of expanding life choices and supporting a person's right to determine whether they want to stay in or leave sex work.

The case studies also show how well-designed programs aim to encourage local ownership and how this can be achieved, particularly in the form of developing a program that reflects sex workers' priorities. A sex worker-centred methodology is crucial, and some of the ways that this can be achieved is through undertaking regular and ongoing needs assessments with sex workers and providing direct support from peer workers who have a lived experience of sex work and reflect service user backgrounds. This can also be achieved by developing a transitioning program bottom-up over a period of time with the direct involvement of sex workers in all stages and supporting sex worker-led initiatives and interventions. This is a critical aspect of transition programming as it will encourage local ownership and can play a pivotal role in creating an enabling environment where sex workers feel confident in their ability to negotiate transitions. A transitioning program operating from a community empowerment framework is uniquely positioned to play a crucial role in community mobilisation and transforming power relations through developing critical consciousness among sex workers to take control of their lives (Beniot et al., 2017). Promising practices need to include community empowerment-based approaches that give precedence to the engagement of sex workers in the development and delivery of the program – transitioning programs that do not operate from this framework may end up doing more harm than good. One of the reasons for this is that the ideological underpinnings of 'exiting' and some transitioning programs negates the idea of sex work as *work* and ultimately reinforce and compound the stigma and myths surrounding sex work. Based

on a review of the literature, interviews with key stakeholders and the development of examples of promising or emerging practice in transitioning programs, a rights-based approach that uses a sex work-as-work framework is the most effective and respectful way to design and deliver transitioning services. The report details key elements for developing a rights-based program and makes recommendations on some of the more crucial aspects of this.

The provision of transitioning services within a framework that does not recognise sex work as a valid career choice can contribute to the stigmatisation and marginalisation of sex workers. The research reviewed in this report was resoundingly clear in the finding that criminalising sex work makes it difficult for sex workers to transition out of the industry, and this also includes criminalisation in the form of criminalising the clients of sex workers under a regulatory framework dubbed the Swedish Model.<sup>19</sup> Transitioning programs need to work with government to consider issues related to regulatory frameworks and legislative contexts that create hierarchies of regulated and unregulated sectors that create barriers to transitioning. The decriminalisation of sex work is a necessary step in breaking down the stigmatisation and marginalisation faced by sex workers and in helping to facilitate transitions. The ten key recommendations have been developed based on the idea that a well-designed transitioning program can play a key role in addressing and reducing the stigma surrounding sex work, which is one of the biggest barriers workers face with transitions.

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<sup>19</sup> The Swedish Model is also referred to as the Nordic Model. It is a model of regulating sex work implemented in Sweden, Norway and Iceland. France recently adopted similar laws and UK policy makers are considering implementing the model. The model is based on an understanding of sex work as a form of male violence against women. The model supposedly 'decriminalises' the provision of sexual services (with service providers recognised as vulnerable women) while criminalising the purchasing of sexual services (Skilbrei & Holmström, 2013).

## 8 Appendices & references

### 8.1.1 Appendix 1: Literature review framework & evaluation criteria developed for establishing promising practices in transitioning programs

#### LITERATURE REVIEW FRAMEWORK

**Search dates:** 01/01/2002 until 31/12/2017 (last fifteen years)

**Search terms:**

sex work AND exit programs; sex work AND exit programs AND decriminalization; sex work AND exit programs AND legalization; sex work AND exit programs AND criminalization; prostitution AND exit programs; sex work AND transitioning programs; sex work AND career development programs; sex trafficking AND career development programs; sex work AND leaving; prostitution AND leaving; prostitution AND transition; sex work AND transition; sex industry OR prostitution OR sex work AND retirement.

**Databases:** CINCH: Australian Criminology Database (Informit), CINCH-Health (Informit), Current Contents Connect (ISI) [Web of Science], EBSCOhost, Google Scholar, Informit, IngentaConnect, JSTOR, ProQuest, PsychINFO, Scopus, SpringerLink, Web of Science.

**Languages:** English language only

**Additional parameters:** Scholarly publications with research on: exiting or transitioning from the sex industry. Grey literature including program reports, evidence reviews, or evaluations of sex industry exiting or transitioning programs.

**Inclusion/exclusion:** Read abstracts to determine applicability to the evidence review brief and inclusion or exclusion from the review.

**Grey literature:** In addition to the literature review framework, grey literature was sought through desktop research as outlined in the promising practices evaluation criteria.

#### EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR PROMISING PRACTICES IN TRANSITIONING PROGRAMS

**Methods:** The search methods for transitioning programs utilised findings from the literature review (i.e. any research that identified transitioning and 'exit' programs) being complemented by a desk-based online search via google with the key words: sex work transitioning programs/programs; sex work career development; prostitution exiting programs/programs; diversion programs/programs; and sex work organisations. In addition to using these search terms, the Sex Worker Research Hub (based in the UK) was contacted to find out about programs in the UK and Canada and where the contact details were available, organisations were contacted to establish whether they had a transitioning program, and if so, whether they could provide information on the program. For the purposes of the evaluation, organisations were required to have a self-described 'transitioning' or 'exit' program. Organisations that provided ad hoc services were excluded from analysis.

The programs were evaluated in terms of whether they fit examples of best practice, promising practice or emerging practice. The criteria developed for establishing best and promising practice are listed in the table below. Most programs did not meet the criteria for promising practice largely due to the quality of evidence available. The criteria are drawn from work undertaken on developing a framework for promising practice in transitioning programs, which is reported in the Technical and Background Paper (see Sandy, Meenagh, & Nes-ladicola, 2019). All of the programs reviewed failed to meet the criteria for best practice and promising practice, but a few met the criteria for emerging practice and some of these have been included in the main reports as case studies. As the table

shows, to be considered for promising or emerging practice, programs must be guided by a sex work as work framework, which is recognised as best practice in providing services for sex workers and a sex worker-centred methodology.

**Table 5: Inclusion/exclusion criteria for best, promising and emerging practice in transitioning programs**

<b>Exclusion criteria best practice</b>	<b>Exclusion criteria promising practice</b>	<b>Inclusion criteria best practice in sex work</b>
Grey literature only	No basis in theories, standards or evidence	Sex work as work
Impact: long-term objectives with short-term outcomes	Limited quality of evidence	Rights-based approach & community empowerment framework
No basis in theories, standards or evidence		Peer driven (sex worker-led)
Implemented only once		Peer engagement and outreach
Low size of impact		
Moderate quality of evidence		



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