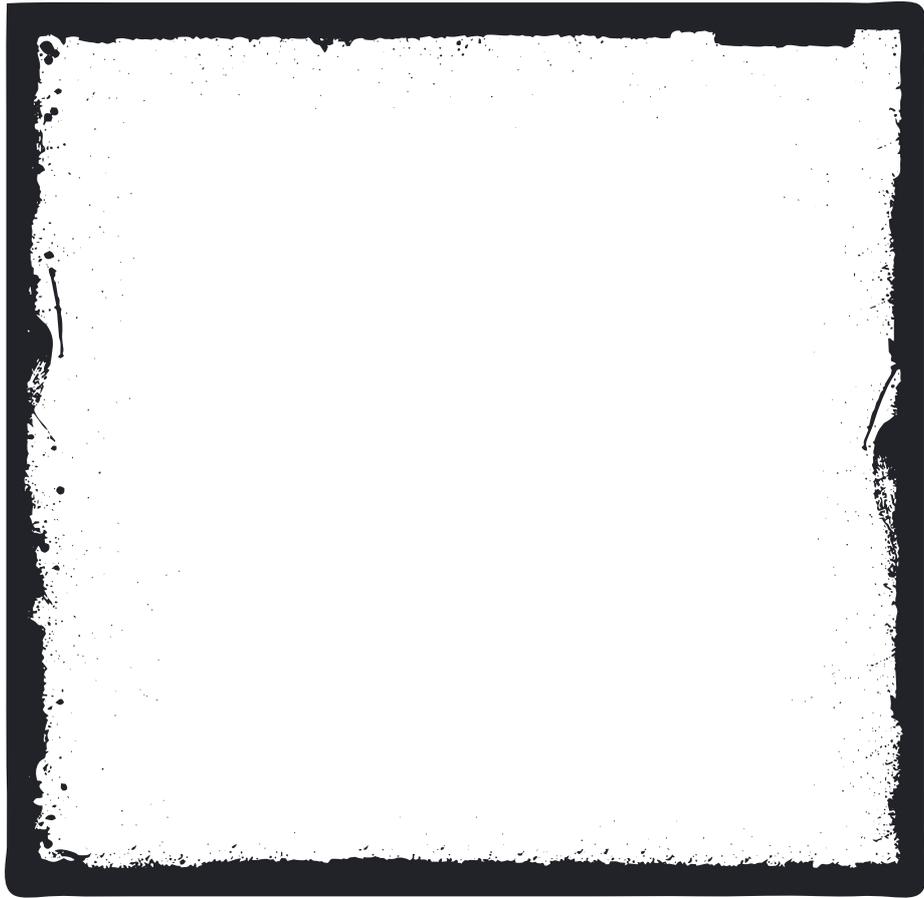




**OUTSIDE**





# OUTSIDE

## MOVING ON FROM THE SEX INDUSTRY



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

***Thanks to Kandi, Alice, Paige, Barbie and the other women in Outside who generously shared their pasts, their journeys out of the sex industry and their hopes for the future with us.***

These exiting stories haven't been heard before and you have allowed us an insight to the hurdles and barriers, the support and guides you had along the way. You have shown us your skills, your strengths and your visions for your futures.

Outside has been developed by The Women's Support Project for Encompass, a network of services and agencies working across Scotland with those involved in the sex industry.

Outside was made possible thanks to the Violence Against Women and Girls funding from the Scottish Government.

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OUTSIDE

# INTRODUCTION

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**Coordinated and supported by the Encompass Network, 'Outside' amplifies the voices of women who have been involved and are now exited from the sex industry in Scotland. These women have not had a place and space for their experiences to be heard before.**

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Women took part in recorded conversations about their journeys and experiences of exiting with Linda Thompson from the Women's Support Project during Covid 19. The plans for this project had been much larger with creative activities and opportunities for the women but the pandemic changed all that. Outside became a much smaller and much more lengthy piece of work.

The conversations took place online, as all the work did. This was very different to the Inside Outside project but reflects the times we all have lived through.

Some of the conversations were long, some short with high emotions, as the women took themselves back to that stage of their lives, recalling all that had helped and hindered them. Some women found it easier than others but each conversation was led by the woman, taking place when she was ready to talk. Some women took months to build up to talk whereas other had waited a very long time for a chance to share their experiences.

There was a raft of reasons for taking part, a chance to disclose, to work through their past or to show that life can and does move on.

Their stories are as varied as the women but threads connect them – their strength, their resilience, their skills and their dreams.

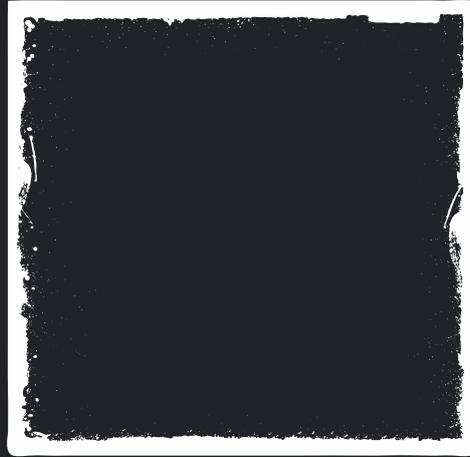
Each woman had control over which parts of her story she wanted to keep for herself and which she wanted to share. They decided what they wanted to focus on, A lot has been kept just for them, the importance being in the telling of the tale. Names and some details have been changed to preserve anonymity, a huge fear for the women.

We thank the women for their openness, their bravery and their willingness to share. They have told their stories, now it is up to us to listen and make change.

To these Outsiders – thank you.

You are truly inspirational.

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## OUTSIDE

MOVING ON FROM  
THE SEX INDUSTRY

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# KANDI

*I am in my early 40s.*

*I was a prostitute for almost 10 years and have exited for 3 years.*

*My happiest times are with my children and our dogs, on a campsite near a beach.*

*I am doing voluntary work and work as a carer.*

*I want to buy a campervan and head off travelling when the kids grow up.*

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*See, I don't talk too much about those days, those 10 years. I'm ashamed about a lot of it.*

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**My story about exiting? Who's interested. Like really? I mean, who actually cares about what a prostitute or ex prostitute did to get out of the life?**

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See, I was a prostitute for ten years, well about that long. It wasn't like it was every day but nearly. Ten long bloody years. I thought I would be doing it for a couple of months to get us over a rough patch. That rough patch seemed to go on for a very very long time.

I lost my job see, there was big lay offs and I was one of the first to go. You know - last in, first out sorta thing. My man see, he'd already got hurt at work so he was off on the sick for ages. It was his back see, he did it in and that was no good for a roofer. He went into depression, see, he was used to being outside and hated being stuck in with the kids and me. That was a bad time, aye, that was all tough.

His money was down and without my money, there just wasn't enough to get us by. I'd put applications into loads of places but there wasn't much around, see, there really wasn't. I did some stuff for cash - even had a go doing deliveries for a takeaway but that didn't last. The car needed stuff done, it had done for a while and we'd no money for that. We needed that car.

I laugh now when I think of it. What I thought I knew - you know, what it'd be like. See, it'd been a joke, we used to joke about all the things we'd want and I'd say, joking like, "I'll need to go on the game for that." See, I never thought that I'd be doing that. Having to

do that, but life sometimes doesn't go the way you think, does it?

We never even talked about it when I was starting it. See, I thought I could do it, maybe for a bit to just help. It did and it didn't help. I mean it got us through right enough but it ruined us too. Me and him were never the same again, it was always there. Every row, it was there. I think he blamed himself and he blamed me. He couldn't bring the money in and he hated me for what I did for it. I think he hated all of it really but he wouldn't talk, we couldn't talk about it.

When he left, there was times I didn't think I would make it. I had the kids so I had to, I had to keep going because I was all they really had then. I couldn't go running away. I didn't have that choice. The kids, see they never knew what I did, all those times they stayed with their gran or away at my sisters. I fitted my work round the kids the best I could, we were able to keep the house, that was really important to me. They still don't know. I mean, how could I tell my kids? How could I? I would never want either of them in that life. Never. No way.

I still fear they're going to find out, I'm afraid their dad'll tell them. I don't think he would but he's never got over it. He doesn't say anything to me now but those first few years, Christ but he'd hurt me about it. Vicious. He knows, my mum knows and my sister knows. I don't think I'll ever tell anyone else again.

See, I don't talk too much about those days, those 10 years. I'm shamed about a lot of it. It happened and I cant change that but see, I can't just switch it all off

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***I wasn't really there – all those times with the men.  
I'd stare out windows, stare at the patterns on  
curtains, those bloody ceilings.***

though, forget everything in all those years. Christ, I wish I could. I've felt it all see, the anger, the hurt, the disgust, the humiliation. I had to swallow that all down every day and head over to that place with a smile on my face but those feelings would stick in my throat. Some days it'd be right here, that big ball of feelings and I wouldn't be able to speak. Sometimes the feeling of emptiness and hollowness took over. I'd wake up and feel like a shell – like a crust with just a big empty space inside.

I wasn't really there – all those times with the men. I'd stare out windows, stare at the patterns on curtains, those bloody ceilings. I'd make out lists of where I wanted to travel too, have holidays to. It was me they were with, but not really me you know. See, I was like a blank doll that they could just make into whatever they wanted. Bored housewife who loved a bit on the side? That was me. A mature student studying? That was me. A business woman? That was me. I was all of them – see, they'd just decide what they thought I was and I'd be it for them.

People think I'm hard. Heart of stone they used to say. I'm cold, a bitch. I'm not, I'm really not. I've the biggest heart and my kids know that. My mam and my sister know that.

See, other people, they'd never see me crying at night when I'm on my own, but that life teaches you not to trust. You can't trust in that life, everyone's out for themselves. No-one really has your back, when it comes to it you are on your own believe me. I should know, there was people who got me into things they shouldn't have. They should just have left me alone to

get on with it, kept myself to myself but I got in with bigger groups and things. I got used a lot in that time.

I don't think I'll ever trust men again, you know, connect with them. I've seen too much of what they're really like. I don't think I'll be in a relationship again, ever. Tried it and can't do it. I still find it hard to say no to things. As long as I have my dogs, I'll be alright. The two of them are my best friends, best listeners I've got! The things those two could tell you!

Being a prostitute changed me, oh yes it did. See, I was a prostitute, that's what I was. That's what I would have called myself back then, I wasn't a worker. It paid the bills but I'd never called myself anything but a prostitute. Other women might be different but I didn't want to be doing all that. I really didn't. We'd have to lie to ourselves, it was all lies to hide what you were feeling.

See, I think most of us were brainwashed into thinking we were in control, that we chose it. If we'd chose it, then it was ok but you know, I didn't really choose it. Maybe it's different for the women who really really want to do it but you know, in those 10 years I think I only meet a couple of women like that. See, the rest of us, if it weren't for the money, and mental illnesses, and pressure and addictions – we wouldn't have been doing it. Christ no! I wouldn't have chosen that life.

I remember a woman who'd been doing it for years when I started. She was as hard as nails. I was scared of her at the start. I think everybody was. She kept herself away from the rest of us most of the time. She could be lovely under it all if something bad happened with one

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***See, the longer you were in that life, the more you'd want out but the longer you were in, the harder it all seemed to get out.***

of us, but I'd look at her and think that'll never be me, I won't end up like her doing all that for years. I did though, didn't I. She just disappeared – I mean, one day she wasn't there with the rest of us. I don't think she was like dead but she'd never talked about leaving. She was there four or five times a week. I thought she'd be there in her 80s! We never talked about her again but I wondered where she went to. What she did with her life.

See, none of us talked about leaving. I mean, we'd all be thinking it but we never really spoke about it. Sometimes one of us would say “I can't do this any more” but we'd just nod and like agree but that'd be it. See, the longer you were in that life, the more you'd want out but the longer you were in, the harder it all seemed to get out.

After all of that, those 10 years – I mean what is normal? You know, there I was doing my best, trying to keep me and the kids together and I still am. I'm out of it now but it's not easy. The past three haven't been all that easy with it.

I tried to start new, get out of that life a few times, quite a few times. I'd save some money to get us by, get something sorted and decide it was my last day, never again but then it'd be hard. My health wasn't too good and all these thoughts would start coming back. I would try and keep myself to myself in new jobs but even that didn't seem to work. See, I didn't really trust anybody and I'd get all paranoid. I'd a job as a cleaner for a while, cleaning offices in a building. We'd all start when the workers left for the day. I didn't mind the work so much, I mean Hoovering carpets and emptying

bins isn't the worse but I couldn't do the breaks. They'd all get together but I couldn't speak, you know. I didn't know what to say and was all worried they'd find out too much. I had the fear that I'd say something and they'd realise. It was easier to stay out of it.

There was one time when it was someone's birthday. I hadn't been sitting with them for a few nights – doing my own stuff on my phone and they'd sorted to bring in some cakes. I didn't know about it so when they started bringing out things from home, I'd nothing. I felt stupid, just stupid. I mean they didn't show like they minded but I did. I felt sick at this. I didn't go back to that work after that night, I ran away from it. I mean I look back and see that it was nothing but then, I felt so alone. Like I was trying to get through in this bubble but that fear was with me.

I went to my doctor and told him I was feeling depressed. He put me on a list to see a counsellor. She was alright and I wanted to tell her what I had done. I eventually just blurted it out one day, I was a prostitute. She had this shocked look on her, I can still see her eyes all wide. I think she was trying to be nice but I could tell she wasn't expecting to hear that and wasn't sure what to say. What I remember is her trying to make it ok and saying about it being work. It wasn't work but I think she was worried she'd offend me. I didn't really talk too much after that, I'd think up other things to tell her before I'd go and then just stopped going.

I hit a real low and it was all on top of me. I was trying to make it ok for us but it was too much. I wasn't seeing the kids in the evenings – they'd come back from school and I would be going out to work cleaning somewhere

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***I don't like to think too much about what I had to do. It's not all easy, see. Even though I'm out of that life now, it's still in me.***

or doing a night shift in the care home. I'd some agency work but money was always tight. I would be doing ok and then something would happen. One time I had a bad flu and that set us back months for money.

If money was tight – I'd go back to the sauna for a couple of days but it would end up being more. I'd see the other women with money and I would have none. It was hard see, to go there and leave with money again. It was that temptation – I knew it was always there. I could always go back and they'd not ask me questions. The boss would joke that my room was always open for me. See, I didn't have to hide what all I had done – everyone else there was doing the same thing.

See, if a woman is getting out of that life, it doesn't happen straight away. Well, for me it didn't. I think every time meant I was a bit further on.

I heard about a course happening in our area – a confidence building thing my sister wanted to go to. I only signed up to keep her company but I loved it. I'd never done anything like that – some silly things and talking. Lots of talking and some laughing. One night we had to yell, I mean that sounds stupid now but that was one of my best nights. I yelled and that yell had all those feelings in it, that big ball in my throat got loosened. No wonder – Christ I was loud! I remember seeing the other women's faces. Even my sister looked shocked and she's heard me yell plenty over the years! I never told them about my past, what I had done. I don't know why, I think I could have but see, it was too soon. If I had told them that, then they knew and that meant more people knew. I couldn't have that.

After that course ended, I never went back to the sauna again.

I sold our house. That was a big thing for me, I'd wanted to keep it all those years but I couldn't afford it. See, that was the bottom line – I couldn't afford it. It had been my dream home, I remember going to view it and it felt like home right from then. I'd went to an adviser about my benefits, money and bills. They helped me sort a lot and I told them I had been caring for my mam for years – that's why I hadn't worked. It was ok, the more I told people that, the easier that lie became.

We needed a fresh start and I couldn't have that house hanging over. We got a smaller place further out. It's not the fanciest but we don't need that much nowadays. The best thing is a bigger garden, the dogs love it – all that space. You should've seen them out there in the snow! The kids and I were laughing at them jumping about with the snow in their fur. The kids are doing ok, they're good kids.

I'm still on a list for counselling. I don't like to think too much about what I had to do. It's not all easy, see. Even though I'm out of that life now, it's still in me. See, I was a prostitute and now I'm an ex prostitute. Some days, that big ball of feelings all comes back and I can't speak. It just sits there, and I have to close my eyes and push it away. The kids wonder what is going on but now they know that I am just thinking, Mummy's thinking.

I worked all last year as a carer. All through Covid, I kept working, going round the old people's houses. I was a key worker you know – can you imagine that! My mam

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*I can be proud of what I do now. It might not be much money but I worked for it, it's my money.*

was so proud of me, the kids were proud of me. They had a rainbow in the window for me. See, I could tell people what I did for a living, I can be proud of what I do now. It might not be much money but I worked for it, it's my money. It's honest money.

My what next?

I don't know yet but last year, I would sit out there in the garden at night when it was all quiet. You know, the roads and all were so quiet then and think. See, that was my time for me. Well, the dogs and me. I would sit and think about life and lives and how we end up where we do.

I'd think of all those places I want to travel to and have holidays in, I'd like that for my what next.

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# ALICE

*I am 24.*

*I was involved with an escort agency for a year.*

*I have exited for 2 years now and I am completing my studies. I would love to be a social worker supporting young women who are sexually exploited.*

*I love reading and watching The Great British Bake Off. I am working on a signature dish.*

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***I was the quiet one in school. You know the kind that people look at school pictures and wonder who was that girl, was she even there?***

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**I think I wanted out pretty soon after I started. I knew it wasn't going to be for me, it never really felt right.**

**I was broke, that was why I started. Pure and simple.**

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My mum and dad had been helping me through university. They didn't want me to live away from home, they'd wanted me to stay close by so it wouldn't cost as much but I couldn't wait to get away. I mean it was good at home, but I just wanted to get that you know, independence. Getting away to a new city was the way I saw to get a bit of that. No different to lots of young people where I'm from I suppose – most of us settle somewhere else.

I love my mum and dad, I really do. I mean, they were strict n'all when I was growing up, I didn't mind it really but like some of my pals were allowed to do whatever they wanted. I wasn't. They were so protective, keeping a real close eye on what I was doing, where I was going, who I was with. Stuff like that. Dad always came to collect me and bring me home from wherever. I never had a boyfriend – I was far too quiet back then. Mum and dad would joke that no-one was good enough for me, in their eyes at least.

You see, I was always the baby of our family, I still am. There was a few years between my big sisters and me. I was mum's late surprise to keep her young. That's what she'd say. They were twins. I was a bit of a doll for them, they loved dressing me up and playing with me. I'd get 'em to tell me about the day I was born, it kinda made

me feel special. When I was a baby, they'd push me about our street in the pram and when I got older, I'd just wanted to be with them. You see, I'd love it, sitting in their room and they'd do my hair all fancy and made me up. I loved it – I mean, the chance to be with them. Sometimes they'd forget I was there, just as long as I sat all quiet. If I'd a nightmare or woke up early – I would go to and cuddle in between them instead of mum and dad. I love them, like I really do.

You see, I never had a big group of pals when I was younger, I hated big groups and just liked just one or two pals to be close to. My best pal at primary moved away and I mean, I was lost without her. We did everything together, she was always in ours, she even had her own drawer in my room with her nightie and toothbrush and teddy. She was so so funny and a lot braver than I was. She made me laugh like so much, mum said we were joined at the hip. I cried for days when she moved away, I mean I remember the actual pain I'd in my chest on the first day back in school without her. Her mum and dad said they would help her keep in touch, but they never did. We got back in contact when we were older, but we were both so different, I guess we just stayed drifting away.

I didn't like high school. Oh god no, I mean I hated it. My mum said I was like a ghost in school, and I suppose I kind of was. You see, I never felt like I fitted in with most of my year. I never was in bother either, I bet most of my teachers didn't even know who I was. I don't think there was much memorable about me really back then. I suppose I felt special though when I was with the twins, they'd tell me I was pretty, mum and dad did too but sure, they'd have to wouldn't they!

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***She was really like open about it, talking about how much money she was making... She was totally fine with it, said it was easy.***

I felt so ugly at school. There was all these pretty girls, like really pretty and there was me, I was just short with my wobbly belly and those thick glasses. Oh god, I'd forgotten them! You see, I was always pestering the twins to let me try on their stuff. I'd put it on and then be practising and posing in front of the mirror, flicking my hair, and trying to act so cool. I suppose we all do that? Sure, I was just a kid. It makes me laugh now, but god, I so so wanted to be grown up.

I didn't mix much with boys when I wasn't in school, not much chance to. Sure, I was only allowed to go to a couple of pals houses and a bit of a youth club thing. Other kids were out getting drunk and I would be sat in reading or watching the telly with mum and dad. I suppose I was happy enough but it's a bit sad isn't it.

I was the quiet one in school. You know the kind that people look at school pictures and wonder who was that girl, was she even there? That was me. A wee shadow. A wee ghost looking in from the edges. I mean I got good grades, really good grades, handed my work in on time and didn't make any bother. I got a place at Uni – first in my family. They were all so proud of me, I think dad told everybody at work and mum made sure to drop it into conversation. It was hard for us all when I left, the first chick to fly the nest she'd say, she'd never get rid of the twins!

Mum and dad helped out a bit with things like rent and bills at Uni, but see, money was so tight at home. I knew that. The twins helped too, they were both working part time and chipped in. You see, they got me new clothes and stuff to head off with, they knew that was important to me.

I loved it at Uni. I mean it wasn't all a bed of roses, but it was good. I'd pals, like a bigger group of them. You know, I did feel good about myself. You see, I was looking well and for the first time ever, I was getting a fair amount of attention from the boys. Wee me! Like suddenly I was like popular, and it felt nice, like maybe this was where I was meant to be? I dunno if that even makes sense? It was like, I dunno, I felt I was finally getting to be the real me. You know?

I'd had to get a job when I started, you know, for money. I tried a bit of everything that year – a coffee shop round from our flat, one of the big shops in town, waitressing and then the bar. I stayed there, at the bar for the longest. I mean, I loved it but standing on my feet all night was tough. I'd be exhausted at Uni and it wasn't great money, nowhere enough to get by. You see, I couldn't ask mum and dad for more and the twins did their best. I didn't want to tell them how much debt I was getting and then shifts in the bar changed, I was like getting less hours than before and was trying to fit in some shop work too around studying. It was all a bit mad.

I'd got friendly with a girl from work. She was from close to home too, close to my gran's town and we'd a fair bit in common. I was round at her place one night, there was a girl from her course too. We'd some drinks and that girl, she said she was a sex worker. She was really like open about it, talking about how much money she was making. She'd worked it around her classes and stuff. She was totally fine with it, said it was easy. I mean, I was sitting there working out how many nights in the bar it'd take me to get that kind of money and how long it would take me to clear my debts. She made it

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***I made up a whole character, with like her own story  
in case clients wanted to know more – you see,  
I didn't want to tell them about me.***

sound, well kinda easy, like just having sex with good looking guys and getting paid for it. She'd said she might as well get paid for it, why give it for free. I mean, it all seemed easy enough and alot easier than the bar. You see, I remember looking at her and she seemed so together.

I suppose the idea lodged in my head that night but I couldn't imagine myself actually doing it. Like I did try but I dunno, I was a bit scared. I didn't start right away, not right then. I went and spoke to that girl about it all. She was good that way – like she told me how to get started and all, so I started with an agency about a month later. I mean, it was easy enough to get started – easier than I thought. I'd checked out the forums and read some stuff and found out the names of some businesses. They always needed girls to take on their books. I met up with a woman for a kind of interview, if you could call it that.

They would help me get my photos done and put my profile up and said they would handle all the bookings so I wouldn't need to worry about screening clients. I bought all new underwear – there was a set look the agency wanted. I would never buy myself stuff like that to wear – not my own style at all! I felt a bit stupid trying it on at home and posing in front of the mirror, as if that was all I was going to have to do. I got my hair and my nails done and thought I was ready. It was a bit like being in the twin's room again.

I made up a whole character, with like her own story in case clients wanted to know more – you see, I didn't want to tell them about me. This other me – she was a lot sexier than me! The agency said men liked students,

I was to make sure to tell them that. They had a flat near the centre of town where I would work from, I just had to kinda turn up. I'd decided that I was only going to see two clients a night, once a week enough to cover what the bar had paid. They thought I was leaving there to be an overnight agency care worker.

You see, I didn't tell anyone I was doing this – mum and dad thought I was still in the bar but was tutoring kids as well for more money. I knew it would kill them if they found out, I just knew it would.

The first few clients were all right, I suppose. It wasn't as hard as I thought like I'd had worse sex before and you see, it was over quick enough. I felt stupid and awkward but one of the other girls had said to never let the clients see you were nervous, so I brassed it out. Some clients were ok, some weren't. Some really weren't.

You see, I still don't like to think too much about a lot of it, you know back then. There's some stuff should just stay back there, there's loads of it I can't remember. Maybe I don't want to remember? I know I should, but you know, once I start like really going back to that all, I'm scared what all will come back, like all the memories so maybe its best I dont really go back to all that. I dunno, it definitely changed my opinion of men. I don't think anymore there's many, like, nice ones.

I looked young, I was new, so bookings came in for me. I suppose it felt good – I was on a bit of a high back at the start – you see all that the money right in my hand. You know, I did like being popular, the feeling that men wanted me. I started seeing more and more clients –

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***...some of the girls didn't like that I got so many bookings. We all knew it was because I was small and looked so young.***

the agency said I was one of their most popular and it was hard to say no when the money was good. I was working twice a week with around four clients each time. Sometimes more. The money was rolling in and for 6 months, things seemed good. Looking back, they weren't really but I couldn't see it then. My confidence was up and outside of work, my life seemed great – money for shopping, the gym, going out.

The girls that worked together, we weren't close – I mean we were friendly enough when we were in the flat, but I never met up with them outside of work. I mean I really did not want anyone to link me to that world. There was too much competition underneath it all and some of the girls didn't like that I got so many bookings. We all knew it was because I was small and looked so young. There was always plenty of drugs around – the agency said they weren't keen on that but turned a blind eye. Well more than turn a blind eye if you know what I mean. One of the guys who came to collect our money for them was a dealer, so it was all too easy. You know, some nights I spent nearly all the money I earned. I was using three or four nights a week, but I always just did it at work. I had to, you know, to be able to do what the clients wanted.

The cracks started after about six months I suppose. I wouldn't say it was like just one thing, but it was getting harder. I was dreading the days I was working; I'd wake up feeling all anxious. I was hiding how I was getting the money and it was getting harder. I'd stopped going out so much with my friends, when I wasn't working I was sleeping and when I wasn't sleeping, I'd be thinking about work. I kinda went into a world that my pals didn't know about. I don't want them to know about it.

I started to get anxiety and I was paranoid I was going to be recognised by someone, one of the girls in the flat asked me to head over to Glasgow to work with her in a flat some girls she knew shared. She thought it might be a better idea, to be working away from home but I didn't want to be driving back home in the early hours of the morning.

I'd been lucky, it was only a matter of time, it happens to us all and we get over it. That's what the other girls said.

He was a new client to me but some of them had heard of him before and said he shouldn't have been able to make a booking. I didn't know that until after though. He was rough, too rough and didn't care that I said I didn't do certain services. He said he had checked it with the agency. He wouldn't stop, he didn't stop. I always thought I would fight back. Everything stood still and I couldn't move. He left when he was finished, walked out, and left me there. He left the money though. At least he did that.

I saw the other 2 bookings that night after him. I don't know how I did it, but I did. I went home and I cried all night. I still do sometimes. I haven't talked about it much to anyone. No-one really.

I told the agency the next day about what he had done. They pretended to be concerned but they didn't really care. They'd got their money and said he'd be on a blacklist. They didn't, I heard later about other girls he did that to as well.

I went back the next night, I didn't know what else I could do. I thought I would be ok and brush it off, but it

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***He wouldn't stop, he didn't stop. I always thought I would fight back. Everything stood still and I couldn't move.***

wasn't that easy. I took four bookings and I've not a single memory of who they were or what they did to me. I doubt I said no to anything. They probably thought it was the best service they ever had. When I left the flat that night, I knew my time was over.

I told the agency I was done. They weren't too happy with me, putting the pressure on, told me to take a break and come back, I'd feel different in a while. I think they were more worried about losing my money, you know? They didn't really care about me at all. I told them to take my pictures and profile down, I wanted it all gone but they said they'd keep them there for a while in case I'd change my mind.

I'd lasted about a year and you see if I'm honest now, things were already heading downhill before he got me. I sat down after that last night and tried to work out my money. I'd managed to save a bit out of all those clients – I dunno really know where it all went. Well, I do, it went on booze and drugs and clothes and shopping. All that shite. I'd nothing really to show for it all.

I went home to mum and dad for a while. I couldn't tell them what had happened – I lied and told them I'd been dumped by a boyfriend. I was just numb. I got really sick, all these small things. I couldn't sleep and I'd be up all night when mum and dad were in bed. I'd be going to bed when they were getting up. I was trying to study and do my work, but it was really hard. I couldn't like concentrate and my head was all over the place. I told the twins about him, about the rape but I said I'd met him on a night out. A date.

I kept going over lots of things, not just him but all of

them. The whole lot of them kept coming back to me. One day I was out shopping at home, getting some things for mum and dad and I thought I saw one of them. I dunno why really but the way some man in the shop was looking at me made me think he knew me. Knew what I'd been doing. I ran to the car and puked out the door. I barely made it home.

It took a while, but I called a helpline. It must have taken me about 10 attempts before I could really speak. I couldn't tell them all the truth; I couldn't just bring myself to say who he was. They were so lovely which kinda made it harder. It just set me off. I think they would have been ok with my truth, but I just couldn't.

It wasn't just him though. It was everything. It was all the stuff I'd done, had to do. That happened to me, not the escort, not the profile. You see it wasn't just stopping, it was more than that. I'd start shaking and couldn't breathe proper. It was like my chest was being squeezed, like this big cloud was all around me and pushing me smaller and smaller.

I contacted a place that helps girls in that work, girls like me but there wasn't really much they could do. They didn't have counsellors or anything. They were more for girls who were still in that work, who want to stay doing that work. They were nice enough, but I didn't feel like they really knew what to say or what to tell me what to do. I tried to get in touch with the girl who helped me to get started but she didn't really want to know, I dunno, maybe she felt a bit awkward? I didn't tell her what was really going on with me, but I think she knew. She just wanted me off the phone. I suppose I don't blame her; I mean she was still working so maybe it was hard?

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*It sounds simple – just walk away from something  
but it wasn't that easy. It just wasn't.*

I felt so alone, like I was in this bubble looking out. There was days I just wanted to scream but I couldn't. I remember driving to a beach one day, like really early and standing screaming out to sea. Thank god there wasn't anybody else there to hear me – they'd have thought I was a right mad woman.

I kept checking the agency site and my pictures were there. Every day. They kept them up and kept saying they would take them down soon. They didn't. I mean – they were my pictures and what right they have to do that? I felt sick when I kept seeing them. I was even crying to them to get them down, they just hung up on me and stopped answering. When they were still up there, it was like I was still back there, you know? Like I couldn't kinda get away from it all.

Early one morning I rang a place I found off the internet. I'd googled stuff and found them. I didn't think anyone would even answer. I think I cried for 10 minutes. She was the first person I told about it all. She just let me talk but she kinda knew how I felt, like she got it. She helped me get the stuff sorted with the agency – spoke to the police for me and told me what to say to the agency. That was the first practical stuff anyone done for me.

She got me linked in with other support too. Somebody I could talk to about what had gone on for me and all I was trying to get sorted in my head. I could let that stuff out and they helped me piece it back together again, I suppose it was like counselling but more than that, you know? They helped me sort out stuff with Uni too. I'd missed so much and had just hidden from it all – you know through the breakdown, I didn't really want to

face up to it, hoping it would go away.

They were a bit of a rock for me when it was all too stormy, and I was like a boat just being flung about. It sounds a bit stupid, but they were a bit of an anchor, you know what I mean? They'd helped other girls like me, so I didn't have to worry about what they thought – they just knew.

If I thought being an escort was hard, being an ex-escort was even harder. I didn't just move on with it. It changed me, more than I knew back then. I don't know if other people would really get what it's like in that work you know? It sounds simple – just walk away from something but it wasn't that easy. It just wasn't.

It has taken me a while, but I am coming through it. I can't change all that went on but at least now I know it doesn't have to be who I am. That's back then and now I want to get on.

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# PAIGE

*I am 26.*

*I was an escort for 3 years in brothels across the central belt.*

*I have been out for 2 years and have been spending time with my family.*

*I am involved in arts projects and work as a support worker.*

*I am enjoying finding places to explore and have a new love of paddle boarding.*

## *The Shadow*

Leaving that life, getting out, Getting on  
That's what I thought from dusk until dawn.  
I hated it all, it wasn't for me  
But I was still there, small, tiny not free

I saw other girls heading home on the bus  
Their heads down, all in a rush  
Out from the offices, cafes and shops,  
I was a shadow, not one of them stops.

Their day had just ended and mine had begun  
Clocking on shaking, farewell to the sun  
Who was I, in those pants and that bra  
They didn't listen, lead clients too far

How did I get here? where were my hopes?  
The ties of them all, Their invisible ropes.  
They sold me their lies, used their pull to my push  
Each time ended me, too slow in no rush.

Who did I leave, who was that girl?  
A silly young thing, she'd take on the world  
Under the coke and my frozen grin  
Deep inside my angry bubbling begins

Leaving the life, Moving on, moving out  
I slid open the door, had a slow look about.  
But all I could see was a blank, empty and wide  
Where are you friends, you aren't here by my side?.

Small steps, go forward, build up a stash  
Hid some away, it might open new paths  
She said I could do it, she thought that was true  
There's strength in me, she said, if only I knew

I walked and I fell, I got up and I ran  
Always beside me, her steadying hand  
The roads getting smoother, less bumps in my way  
That shadow of me, well she's gone, gone away

I like who is here, this solid version of me,  
I feel depths, I feel power, I am finally free.  
I've left that life, moved out, moving on.  
It nearly cracked me but I'm still here  
and I'm strong.

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# BARBIE

*I am in my late 40s.*

*I was involved in different ways in the sex industry through saunas, escort agencies and as an independent escort.*

*I have exited for a few years now and I want to be self employed, running my own business.*

*I love cooking for friends and long walks on beaches.*

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***It felt safer working in other cities because nobody knows you and you don't have the same chances of bumping into someone you know or other women knowing where you lived.***

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**Sales and marketing was my background, that's what I did.**

**I always wanted to have my own business, doing my own thing, that's what I wanted.**

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Right in the beginning when I first started in this industry, I worked in the saunas and then I started working for a guy who had an agency of sorts. He had houses in different cities and he had these people who answered the phones. You would go and live in a house for a week and then they would just send people to you. The agency made the bookings for me in other places and through that, I travelled to different cities. I tried not to work in my home city. I wanted to keep the distance between where I worked and where I lived. I just felt really uneasy working where I lived.

It felt safer working in other cities because nobody knows you and you don't have the same chances of bumping into someone you know or other women knowing where you lived. You can keep it hidden and there's less chance of a booking from someone you know... It's just much safer working somewhere where nobody knows you at all.

Another woman helped me to start working as a self-employed independent escort, she was doing it herself. She was actually a friend of mine through a friend of mine if you know what I mean, so I always knew that she was involved in escorting. I was complaining to her about my situation with the agency, they took a huge cut from every booking. She said

that I was giving away all my money to them and I was getting robbed basically. She helped me get set up as self-employed, which was a great help to me at the time because she got me away from people that are actually quite dangerous and people that are just not very nice. We kind of started working together which was much better because she already had a flat set up in another city. She didn't use it when I was over there – we arranged it like that. I paid my share of the rent, it helped her, and it helped me.

When I was working for the agency they did everything. The adverts, the bookings, the arrangements. When I was self-employed, I did all that myself. I preferred it because I had more control over who I saw. I could hear what the person was like on the other side of the phone. If I didn't like the sound of someone, I just wouldn't see them. I'd just say, "I'm sorry, I'm booked up." I'd put a mark next to their name, if they ever called again, I just never answered, so it gave me more control.

There are times when I enjoyed doing this work, believe it or not! There were times I was like, oh, this is great. I'm making loads of money. This is fun. I'm getting loads of compliments from these guys and they're all really nice to me. At times I felt like a movie star in my own movie. There were times I was high-flying and it was great, but that didn't last very long.

I've met some really strange characters over the years. There's people that take advantage of women, definitely. Absolutely, 100 per cent that happens. I've heard horror stories, things that have happened to girls, I just think bloody hell.

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***Some of the women that I know got themselves into all sorts of trouble with gangsters.***

I myself have had managers in hotels saying I could only stay and work from the hotel if they could have sex with me. People contact you and say, "Oh, come on, you can work in this hotel. We won't charge you. We just want to take photos and make videos and..." all sorts of crazy stuff.

There are a lot of people running big businesses with women and they don't want you working independently in their city. Some of the women that I know got themselves into all sorts of trouble with gangsters. There was all sorts of stuff like that - a lot of people taking advantage and setting women up. That's the kind of characters you meet in the underworld of the sex industry.

On one occasion we got kicked out of a flat. People found out we were there, and it was awful how we were treated, it was in the middle of the night, there were police knocking on the door and all sorts. Another time, I rented a flat from these guys - they were gangsters, proper gangsters, and they were just awful. They threatened to kick me out and keep all my money. They were just not nice people to deal with, horrible just horrible.

It wasn't stable, it was very risky and it was dangerous and it was not safe, but I used to think, well, I'm putting myself into this situation and I'm making lots of money, it's the risk I take.

I signed up to Ugly Mugs when I heard about it and thought it may help keep me safer, I thought it was brilliant. I also tried to build up relationships with other women working in the same cities as me, other women

who rented apartments to work from, so at least someone knew I was there, for my safety, I thought that it was good doing it that way.

When I was working in a different city, I used to find out about the services there, you know the places where you can get free condoms and you have access to nurses and stuff like that? If something happened or if I needed to see a nurse urgently or something, I would know where to go. I'd always know where those places were.

There is one that stands out from the rest, it was the best one I ever went to.

The reason for that was honestly the woman who worked there, she was just so lovely. She was an older lady, and she was like a mum. Going to see her was like visiting your mum. I'd never met anyone like that in the field of sex work.

She was just so informal and really nice because we'd come in and sometimes, she'd even have some dinner for us and we'd sit and have dinner together and just have a nice chat and then if I needed anything, she'd give me the things that I needed. She was just a lovely, lovely amazing woman. You didn't feel judged. She just used to make you feel so normal really, she would have really done anything for any of the women I think, if you needed something, she would bend over backwards to make sure you'd get it. She had that kind of attitude and was really compassionate, really understanding. I used to talk to her about everything and anything in my life and she would listen to all of that. She had worked a lot with women that had been working on the streets, she

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***I never saved or built up a nest egg. I never put money away. No, I spent it all. I don't know any women who actually saved.***

had more of a background working with street women but when everything went off-street, she was starting to try to get women who were working from flats like us to come to see her. Women were slowly coming forward because of her kind nature. She was only learning but she listened, she really listened.

I loved that place. I really loved going there. I hated the one I went to in my own home city, it was horrible. It was in a horrible location and just awful, and sometimes there were people wandering about the place. On some occasions, they had it on the same day as the drug clinic and then there were guys around as well, it was really uncomfortable. It was just really shitty and I hated going there, but I knew that I had to. I went because there was nowhere else to go, it was still a good service, don't get me wrong, but it wasn't like a really warm, friendly, relaxed, informal, woman's space. It was really formal. Just the way that it was set up, it was horrible. I always felt more judged there because of the more formal feeling. I don't know why really, that's how I felt anyway, and most of the other women said they felt the same. You'd walk into this clinic, and someone would come out and get you a warm drink and then get your file and go back into the office. You'd just sit in this waiting room and just sit waiting and waiting and waiting and waiting. Eventually, you'd get called in. I'd get my stuff and just leave.

I never saved or built up a nest egg. I never put money away. No, I spent it all. I don't know any women who actually saved. We should have of course, some of us could be very wealthy now if we did, but most of us just used to spend it on having a good time and going out,

eating out in nice places, going to restaurants, going to spa days, going on holidays, shopping and living the high life, I know women that have gone to some amazing countries and gone on amazing holidays. Most of us spend it, most of the women that I knew. You see – that's what makes it worthwhile at the time – it makes what you have to do so much easier.

It's a strange relationship with money. It's not like a normal relationship with money from other jobs. You don't look after the money because you know that next week you'll just be able to make more of it. It's not like you have to sit for a whole month in a job like working really hard to get money. I used to work one whole week out of a month, and I used to make like a whole month's salary for some people. A whole month's salary in a week.

There's no pressure that you have to keep it because it is there, and it can be there the next day too. The money seems easy to come by when you are getting a lot of bookings and that it will always be there as an option. It makes you totally lose sight of reality and you just shop and go to nice places. You've got all this money you can do stuff with, but it can also be like having an addiction, there is a definite cycle of addiction.

You see, there's so many addictions in this work, so many different kinds. It's all about addiction actually. It's either drugs, alcohol, or a sex addiction, or a shopping addiction or spending addiction. I hardly ever met anyone that was just straight. That sounds terrible but most of the time, there were some issues in their life or in their backgrounds.

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***Most of the women I've met over the years didn't look that happy, but they just made the best of the situation they were in.***

There was a group of us that worked in the same city who all got together and kept in touch, there were a whole lot of us. I had a big network of other women that were working in the sex industry, I met quite a few women that were really well educated. There were women who had PhDs and stuff but mostly it was just everyday people working in this field and women that just couldn't cope with the reality of having a nine-to-five job, most of them have had some kind of trauma or were single parents, it seemed like that to me.

Most of the women I've met over the years didn't look that happy, but they just made the best of the situation they were in, and it kind of worked for them at that point. A lot have got a lot of things going on, hectic lives with lots to deal with. They've got a lot of confusion, a lot of alcohol or drug use or some kind of addiction, I knew a lot of women who were sick of it, they were just, "Oh, I can't - I'm really sick of this, but there's no other way. There's nothing else, so I either just grin and bear it or I get out" - and live in poverty, unemployed on benefits for the rest of my life.

I've met women in this field that have landed up in this situation because they're from a different country. Do you know what I mean? They're not even from here originally, they haven't been able to get a normal job, so they've just ended up doing this and then they are, "Well, what else would I do?" so they're just stuck in it, stuck doing it for years.

Most women that just carry on doing this when their own body doesn't want to do it anymore, they start becoming really ill. Eventually, something happens. They either get really bad mental health problems

going on or their bodies start playing up because they are fighting against their values and their fighting against what they really want to do.

They so much don't want to do what they're doing but they're continuously forcing themselves to do it. They get really unwell, or they get a physical illness that prevents them from doing the work anyway. If you carry on doing something against your value system or against what you really want to be doing, eventually something's going to happen. There's a cost somewhere down the line.

I know what it feels like to be doing something because there's no other options and it's the worst thing in the world, having no other options and then having to continue doing something that you don't really want to do, it's like having a gun held to your head. I know some women who ended up killing themselves because they just became so unhappy with what they were doing. It didn't end well.

I reached a stage when it all started to just get on top of me and I thought, I can't cope with this anymore.

I started really thinking about my security and the danger aspect of the work, like trying to be a bit more realistic about what I was doing and what I was involved in, how bad it was, all the worry and stress, and also not knowing who's coming through your door. A few people had been killed over the years and I was getting older too, I was thinking, well, this isn't a job that can sustain me until I'm like 80 or 90 because I don't think I want to be having sex with people when I'm that age, do you know what I mean? Just thinking, if I carry on like this, it

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***As much as I want to get out of this, I can't because I can't afford to because I've got all these bills that I have to pay.***

will mean I will always be involved with all of this for the rest of my life, is that something I really want?

I wasn't making as much money as before. £800 out every time I was going to another city to work just for a week, it's a lot of money to fork out before you even get there, before you see any profits, do you know what I mean? It was the stress of thinking, am I going to make it back in a week, what if I don't, that kind of thing – all the stress, all the uncertainty and all the pressure.

I tried to work in a different city closer to home so I could share costs and not be paying the whole rent myself but that didn't work out.

Also, I felt really – I don't know, low. I was working with another woman that was much younger than me, skinny and really pretty. She was making shit loads of money and I wasn't. She was making way more money than me. I was comparing the two of us, and that wasn't working for me either because I was getting really stressed out, thinking, “Oh, I'm not good enough, I'll need to lose weight, I'll need to do this and need to do that...” I realised how bad it was for my mental health. That woman I was working with, she made me start to question myself thinking, “Oh, I'm too ugly. I'm not making any money. I'm not going to make any more money now because I'm getting older.” You start really questioning yourself, it's almost like you're punishing yourself, and it's not good for your mental health when you start putting yourself down and being so hard on yourself.

I had all of this going on in my head and really worrying about everything so it was quite chaotic a lot of the

time actually, when I think of it now. I think, bloody hell, how the hell did I even do all that. It created a lot of anxiety and I thought, I don't really want to have anxiety all the time and be worried about all these different things.

I felt totally hopeless. I really wanted to get out, I needed to because otherwise my mental health would have got really bad and I would have ended up dead, honestly.

There are so many barriers to leaving and staying out. A lot of the time it's like, “Do you know what? I'm stuck between a rock and a hard place and I can't get out of this.” As much as I want to get out of this, I can't because I can't afford to because I've got all these bills that I have to pay. The reality of this is that if I don't do this work I'm going to end up homeless, I'm going to end up with no money, I'm going to end up working minimum wage, and I'm going to end up not being able to feed my kids. Then women are meant to choose. They've gone through so much already and then to have to think, well, in order for me to come out of this, I'm going to have to go through so much more and it's going to be so, so tough. They end up just going, you know what, I'll just have to keep doing it, and that's the reality of it. They get stuck in sex work because there's no exit to this. Well, not an easy one anyway. It's a bloody hard thing to do to exit the sex industry, luckily I have a strong character because one day I just stopped. I was in a flat that I'd already paid the whole week for and I was like, I can't even be here, I can't do this anymore. I left the flat and that was the end of that. I've just never gone back since that day.

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***If the government is expecting to eradicate this line of work then they're going to have to put some better options out there for people.***

At the time I was involved with an agency that was fighting for rights for people working in the sex industry but they couldn't support me when I left because it wasn't their area of expertise.

I had also told staff at the clinics I attended that I wanted out, I'd say, "Oh, I don't know what to do. It's just so difficult. I don't want to do this anymore. Can you help me? I want to leave this." But they had nothing they could do for me, other than just sit and listen. I mean that helped and they were good at listening but nobody there could give me the concrete help I really needed. Not one place could do all that.

I ended up homeless. When I stopped working that's where I ended up.

I had to go on benefits but that didn't cover my rent as I was staying in a really expensive part of town. I could afford that when I was working but once I stopped – I didn't have money to pay for myself. That's what exiting sex work meant, that's what happens when you get out, you end up on your knees, with no money, homeless. Do you know what I mean? It's not pleasant. When other women see or hear that you became homeless and penniless – of course they are going to stay in the industry and be petrified to leave with nothing to look forward to except a life of poverty.

All the people that I knew, they're all still in, and very much in. I'm not close to them anymore because once you exit the sex industry you drift away from everyone in that world, even people that were your friends for many years. The underworld of sex work is very different, it's not like the real world at all, it's totally

different and you must learn a new way.

Women need the right support to get over these big changes, somebody needs to be the safety net because at the minute the government isn't providing any safety net for anybody.

What women see is that if you're living with domestic abuse and you want to leave, there's lots of services there to support you, there's options there for you but for women who work in the sex industry and want to leave – oh it seems like there is a problem and no-one really cares. It's the sex industry and the whole stigma surrounding sex work. It feels like, people think that women that have been involved with the sex industry deserve it, it's their fault, they chose the wrong road, and they'll need to deal with it. It's their problem, they'll just have to deal with it. It's their fault because they went into that line of work in the first place, they shouldn't have done that, it's not acceptable.

It seems that's the kind of attitude that the government and the world in general has about women from the sex industry. I think that's what makes the women get quite angry. Do you know what I mean? If the government is expecting to eradicate this line of work then they're going to have to put some better options out there for people, otherwise, I'm sorry but people aren't going to leave. It's not because they don't want to choose a different way, it's because they can't.

There is no good exiting plan and there is no support and help to make that transition easier. It is not available to most women so most women will go, oh, hell, I don't think I could face that because they've

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***If they're not given the right kind of support, they can get involved with the wrong side of the law while they're trying to exit.***

already faced so much by doing sex work, they've faced a hell of a lot. I tell you what, they've come across huge amounts of challenges and they've dealt with situations that most people have never dealt with their whole lives.

I know I have been through trauma and that trauma has to heal. I have to get my head around a lot of different things, about the choices I made and how things didn't align with my values. Well, that's for me, I'm not saying for every woman, but I think most women, if they're wanting to get out of sex work, there's a lot of confusion about who they are and what they've done and why they've done it and why they chose that path. They've made a mistake and there's guilt and there's all these different emotions that someone might be feeling. They need support for that, yes, and I promise you it's the worst place ever when there's no support. Ask me, I know. It's frickin awful, honestly, because you feel like you're going a bit crazy because you're making a decision to leave something that's impacting your finances, it impacts on the kind of lifestyle that you're living, it's impacting everything about your life and there's no one holding you up.

There are just not the right services out there and there needs to be. I think most importantly there are a lot of people that want to exit this profession. Whether they think they do or they don't right now, most of them at some point will exit, I think. Those services need to be there.

You know, lots of women, if those services aren't there - if they're not given the right kind of support, they can get involved with the wrong side of the law while

they're trying to exit. They might start doing things just so that they can manage what's going on at the time of exiting or they are going to do whatever they have to do to get money and then get on the wrong side of the law. They might start shoplifting and some women even decide to start selling drugs and get involved in all sorts of other criminality.

Remember they've been in an underworld and have met quite a few criminals in their time! There are people out there that are willing to show girls different ways of doing things in different underhanded businesses, So, it's almost like saying to the government, we can support these women so that they don't go and do these things, so they don't go and get into trouble with the law, so that they do become employed, and they don't go down the wrong end of the law.

You see, there's all different kinds of women working at different levels doing different things. You need to look at each woman individually, because each woman is going to have different skills, they're going to have a different background, they're going to have a different story to tell. Not every single woman, just because they've been involved in the sex industry, is the same or should be labelled as the same because that's what people tend to do, they say things like, "Oh, she's just rubbish, she wouldn't be able to do that kind of job." It's having labels for people and thinking about what somebody's life could or couldn't be after doing sex work that are really damaging, It's the stigma, I think every single case is different and every single case should be treated as such and the stigma needs to be dropped.

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***I needed access to a counsellor that specifically helped with exiting the sex industry, I needed some serious counselling.***

Women will come up with similar challenges, it doesn't matter what their background is or what type of sex work they were doing, they are going to have a lot of the same challenges, I think.

You've got to deal with the trauma because there's a lot of trauma involved in sex work, this needs to be done first before anything else, even before getting another job. In most cases, not all cases, but I think in a lot of cases the sex work is blocked out so they're not actually aware that they have experienced any trauma, but they'll be having different side effects like maybe they become really anxious, or they can't go to certain areas. There will be little signs as to how this has affected them in a negative way.

I had gone to different services saying to them, "Can you help me? I want to leave this. I can't do it any more", but there was no help because they couldn't – it wasn't what they were set up to do. You really start questioning about what you've done and what you can offer and end up thinking, "Oh, bloody hell, is this it? Is this my life? Is this how it's destined to be?" I didn't have a substance addiction and it felt that there wasn't the support for somebody who's maybe a bit more ambitious or who's looking to do something a little bit different, like opening your own business.

I got referred to another project and they helped me with practical things like when I got my new flat, they helped get funding for new furniture. If I needed to go to appointments and needed someone to go with me, they would come with me and they helped with other practical stuff too but there were a lot of barriers to actually the types of help they could give me. I needed

specialist support, but they couldn't offer it. They were helping women, but they could not offer the specialist support that a women exiting sex work needed.

What the Government needs to do is make sure women don't have to do sex work if they don't want to, they need to get the right support to actually move woman out of the sex industry when they want to and they have to get something else to move onto, otherwise you're forcing vulnerable women to stay in the same situation they're in and they're not doing it willingly, it's like the government is raping woman on a daily basis. There are huge gaps in services offered around supporting women to exit the sex industry.

I needed access to a counsellor that specifically helped with exiting the sex industry, I needed some serious counselling. I needed a place to go that completely understood what I was going through and what I was doing and why I was doing it, I needed support for everything that I was going through because it was hectic.

I couldn't get access to that kind of specialist counselling.

There is no one agency out there that says, "Right, this is what you're going to do. This is what you can do. This is what we can put in place for you so that we can make that possible." There is no one agency out there that can do all that. You need a specialist service for exiting the underworld of sex work. The sex industry is a very specialist underworld and it's a very complicated one to exit, there needs to be a service that can support you through your exit and it needs to be a good service that

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***There are women who are stuck in this industry, they do not want to do it any more because it's dangerous and they don't feel safe.***

actually supports each individual as an individual and takes them for who they are and what they stand for and what they would like to achieve in their life. And that's how you should be supporting each individual that comes through your door.

There are women in the sex industry that love it and think it's great and they're making loads of money and it's in line with their value system and it works for them, however there should be support for those women, like not putting them in dangerous situations, giving them their rights and supporting them but for the people that are doing sex work that don't want to do it and aren't happy doing it, they should have rights and support to exit and that support should not only be available for women that are trafficked. There are women who are stuck in this industry, they do not want to do it any more because it's dangerous and they don't feel safe and they're unhappy with what they're doing, so there needs to be support for them to exit.

There are just not the right services out there and there needs to be. I think most importantly there are a lot of people that want to exit this profession. Whether they think they do or they don't right now, most of them at some point will exit, I think. Those services need to be there.

It's kind of like, well, what do I do? Do I stay doing what I'm doing now where I'm at least getting by and I've got extra money to do other things after the end of the month even though I have to get out? It's having jobs available for people that they can go into, but it needs to be a living wage, a proper job. That's what they need. That's at least something that someone can look

forward to. Honestly, if you'd been working at the level that some of these women have been working at and the amount of money they've been earning and realise you have to go from that to being like, my future is surviving on benefits or minimum wage. The reality of it is that's what they're faced with when they want to leave. Can you imagine going from £2,000 a week to £70 a week?

It's a massive jump, and yes, some women do it when things get really tough. Other women do it because they're like, okay, my self respect and my sanity and just about everything are worth more. I'm going to have to stop. Sometimes they do but it's very few, I think.

Remember, that's why women go into sex work in the first place – the money and lack of opportunities to make good money. At the end of the day, women wouldn't do this work; this would not be an option for women if they had better options.

That's the other thing about this, why is the government not giving women better options? Why are they just giving us the same options that we've always had and expecting us to be not doing sex work? They should be seriously looking at what's going on in the world right now, because sex work is never going to stop, although that's what they would like. If they think it's so awfully wrong and that women shouldn't be doing it, they've got all these laws against vulnerable women, they've got all these laws putting people into very vulnerable situations. So that's what they're doing but then they're also not doing anything about the opportunities that women are being given to get out of this kind of work. Why not? Why aren't they?

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***It's about having services that can support people's problems, the problems they're actually having.***

If I was any government out there I would be feeling terrible, I'd be feeling like I'm keeping all of these people in the same position that they're in because I'm not giving them options. I'm just keeping them stuck in this place with a gun held to their head, that's what they're doing to all these thousands of women that would really not want to be doing what they're doing but they're just doing it because they realise there really aren't any other options for them so they're continually doing it. Most of those ones that do continue are the ones that just can't face living a future in poverty, they just can't face it. They can't face their kids suffering in poverty and having no opportunities. They end up just so miserable, they get so screwed up because they're so miserable and they just don't have any quality of life. It's really sad. I know women who ended up dead. It was too much.

I think it's really important that women have one place that they go to where they meet one worker that supports them on their journey and they get all they need from that one service. Yes, women might need different professionals within that space, but it shouldn't be that they have to go to 20 different organisations, they shouldn't have to deal with, "Oh we'll send you here and we'll send you there and everywhere", it shouldn't be like that, that's a mistake. There are lots of good services out there for various different things in life, but there's too many, and for one person to have to jump around all over the place trying to get support, I don't think it's very good for continuity and just for that person's own fricking self-esteem and mental health and everything. No, they should just go to one place and get what they need in one place, you know?

It's about having services that can support people's problems, the problems they're actually having, so it has to include addictions, very much addictions actually, because in that line of work there are so many addictions. I had huge issues; shopping addictions, It's about having services that can support people's problems, the problems they're actually having, so it has to include addictions, very much addictions actually, because in that line of work there are so many addictions. I had huge issues; shopping addictions, really bad shopping problems and that's a cycle of addiction. Nobody helped me with that, I had to sort my own shit out, which I have. It's taken me a bloody long time to do but that's what I was faced with. When I really looked in the mirror I was faced with, right, you've got a shopping addiction and you've got really low self-confidence and self-esteem and how am I supposed to get a job with all that crap?

I think it needs to be a specialist service and I think it does have to be informed very clearly by women who have been involved and who've lived that life and understand it all, the good, the bad and the ugly, the money and sometimes the excitement.

There needs to be like specific programmes for women so that they have something to look forward to. Workshops, courses, groups. Rather than thinking, "Oh, my God, what am I going to do", thinking, "do you know what, I've got so much to look forward to?"

I want to go to this place and they can support me with everything I need. They can get me the counsellors I need. They can maybe get me a little bit of financial backing. I'm not talking about giving anyone like

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***If an employer asks you, what have you been doing for the last ten years, what are you supposed to say?***

£2,000, do you know what I mean, but I'm saying a little bit of extra support just while you're transitioning, yes? Like a grant. That could make the difference. Having that small amount of money available to help either create a new career for themselves or a new life for themselves.

These projects, need to be self-funded as well. They need to be able to sell things, even if you created something where people, even ex sex workers are making things that are getting sold so that the agencies can make money in other ways as well so not completely reliant on funding, because when you're completely reliant on funding it falls apart because there's just no money available these days.

A lot of women that have been involved in the sex industry have lots of skills, they are very observant, they're very aware of their surroundings, they can multitask, they've definitely got people skills, they are compassionate and have to be very resilient to be able to do sex work, they are incredibly skilful and have natural business skills – their skills are being wasted.

There's so many opportunities nowadays to open businesses even online. Do you know what I mean? Having specialist people that can teach people how to set up and run online businesses selling stuff on Amazon, for instance. I think if something like that existed, giving new business advice and skills was in place, I still wouldn't be struggling. I'd have my own online business. There could be workshops with business mentors or coaches, that would really have helped me. Do you know what I mean?

The biggest problem I think is if somebody's been involved in the sex industry a lot of the time, the gaps are there. Sometimes women haven't been on benefits and that's when the big problem comes in. What are they going to say in benefit interviews? How do they explain what they have been doing for years at a time?

If they're going for a normal job, which in most cases they're probably not going to get unless they lie through their teeth, which most of them end up doing because that's what they've been doing for years, living a double life in the sex industry, we've had to lie and get references from all sorts of different places even to rent flats to work in. Sometimes you have to get made up fake references, so I guess that's what they would be doing, getting made up fake references. In the real world you need real references.

If an employer asks you, what have you been doing for the last ten years, what are you supposed to say? They're going to think, well, either she's been on benefits doing nothing or there's something wrong. Has she been unwell, and then they ask you probing questions, to try and dig and find out why you have been on benefits for so long? And if you haven't been on benefits – just what exactly have you been doing then?

It's a really big barrier so they need support with that – what do I say? What do I do? What do I put on my CV?

At the end of the day, it's a difficult topic to talk about and for them to openly discuss, but I think that sex work is never going to go away unless they really look at the options that people have in life and they start making

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***You could employ ex sex workers as mentors or one-to-one coaches and they would be put in contact with somebody who wants to exit sex work.***

different options for people where it's not that hard to make ends meet.

If somebody's been living that kind of lifestyle where they've earned all this money and it's so easy to come by, they actually need some support to get their finances back intact and to come back down to earth, to know how to budget. They need support to do that, they can't just suddenly know how to become a super amazing budgeter; they need classes and they need support to show them, how do you budget? How are you going to make that money work for you so that you're not struggling, so you're not running out of money? They need classes that teach them that. While they are very good business people and they've learnt a lot of business skills, they don't always have good financial skills and they maybe need a bit of help to get back on top of finances and they need that specialist support and help. You could employ ex sex workers as mentors or one-to-one coaches and they would be put in contact with somebody who wants to exit sex work, you could be giving women who have left the sex industry another job, part time or whatever to support other women on their exiting journey. Give women opportunities so that they can move forward with their lives and then at the same time they might be helping others that are wanting to move forward with their lives, do you know what I mean?

You could do it all confidentially and anonymously, online or on the phone. It would have to be. Remember as soon as another woman knows, or anybody knows that somebody's been involved then they can't necessarily just keep that hidden any more, somebody else has that information about them.

You would have to build up really good, solid, trusting relationships first before somebody would say that they would be willing to meet somebody else who had previously worked in the sex industry.

There has to be better opportunities for women, concrete opportunities, that's it. A chance to work, gain experience and learn things – like companies who would give women chances but anonymously. Not labelled as ex sex workers but proper chances. To help you do and build what you really want, your own business too, like I want.

I'm not the same person that I was when I started doing sex work years ago, I'm different. I was young, I was vulnerable and willing to take unnecessary risks. I should have known better and men should not have thought it was okay to purchase sex from a young girl that thought she had no other viable options to better her life. It's taken me years on my own to get where I am now, yet I still have the same yearning to better my life and I still want to run my own business, working from home selling things from an online shop. Even though I'm older now, I still need the help to do what I desire to do, as still the government has not created a service that supports ex sex workers, I need someone who knows about setting up an online business to show me how and then I'll be set and I can use all my business skills to get where I want to be.

Please don't let me be another statistic that goes back into the dark underworld of the sex industry because I have no other options.

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*There are women who are stuck in this industry, they do not want to do it any more because it's dangerous and they don't feel safe.*

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*It sounds simple – just walk away from something but it wasn't that easy. It just wasn't.*

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*If they're not given the right kind of support, they can get involved with the wrong side of the law while they're trying to exit.*

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*He wouldn't stop, he didn't stop. I always thought I would fight back. Everything stood still and I couldn't move.*

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*I can be proud of what I do now. It might not be much money but I worked for it, it's my money.*





**OUTSIDE**



OUTSIDE

