



# **JOURNEY OF BUTTERFLIES 2016**

*Safety • Dignity • Justice*

**Butterfly**

Asian and Migrant Sex Workers Support Network

## • Preface •

Thank you all of you in support of Butterfly, the Asian Migrant Sex Worker Network. It's been one and a half years since Butterfly was founded in Toronto, and this time feels both very short and very long. We have had an amazing journey so far, with a long way ahead of us to go, and we are so lucky and glad to have the support of so many people who have worked together to help Butterfly fly off the ground.

One thing we've learned through organizing at Butterfly is that the workers who work in massage parlour and sex industry are so amazing! It has been a privilege to grow with the community, in Asia and in North America. Many people think that Butterfly is a social service organization, but we are much more than that. We are a community; we share love; we laugh and cry together; and it's not easy, but with all the support, I think we have found the little steps we need to move forward.

Thank you to all the people who have given us support and space, especially at the beginning of our organizing. This has been a really challenging time. Most people don't believe that such a small organization without funding, without any structure, can grow and do such impactful work, in Toronto and nationally - but we have done it! And we are continuing to do it better and better every year.

People throw stones at us all the time, as migrant sex workers; just as people throw stones at the sex worker community at large. We often feel like we are stuck at the bottom of a well, but the stones that people throw at us become the steps that we can walk on to get out of the well. So we don't fear them. The more people throw stones at us, the more we understand how to step on the unfair path that their discrimination has shown us, and to come out of the well and be stronger. We keep moving forward.

Tonight, we want to give specific thanks to the people giving us support and

love, especially during the times when we had nothing. We don't have a lot now, but we are grateful for the love and care you have shown, and most importantly, we are grateful for the spaces that you have opened up for us: sex worker spaces, migrant spaces, labour spaces - you are the allies who enable Butterfly voices to be heard. It takes a lot of allies, working together, to affirm our dignity and our place at the policy table. Thank you for sharing your space with us.

We also want to thank every worker in our community, no matter if you are working in a massage parlor, indoor or hotel, no matter what kinds of services you offer - you give us the trust and opportunity to communicate, so we can learn from you, and we can hear your life stories - full of struggle but also a lot of accomplishments, beauty, and happiness, which we think as a society need to be heard.

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We are just beginning on a road together and we have much work ahead of us. This is why we want to have this small gathering with allies and supporters, so people can learn a little bit about our work, our mission, and keep helping us to let more people hear these Butterfly voices, and support us to create more understanding in society and better laws.

We face a lot of oppression, especially due to anti-trafficking policies, which

are particularly harmful. Every day, we hear women in our community being harassed, deported, detained by police. Also, a lot of women are being assaulted, sexually assaulted, and even murdered. Unfortunately, these are the same stories we have always heard, and these bad stories are because of bad policies, and discrimination from society. We are not even allowed to do anything to help each other so long as we have bad laws.

That is why we need your support and love right now, and we hope that through working together, we can grow as a movement across different issues: sex worker rights, migrant labour rights, police accountability against racialized people, especially murdered and missing indigenous women and youth, rights of the homeless and disabled, for harm reduction and decriminalization. When we all work together in Toronto, in Canada and other parts of the world to address the oppressions that we all share, then we can grow, and fly higher together.

We need to believe that we can fly higher together. We need to believe that we can win. The thing people need to know about butterflies is that we fly everywhere; we fly beyond borders. Butterflies are beautiful, but you can not hold them in your hands. You can not protect them this way. What you need to protect them is to create supportive space and environment, so that they can choose their own life and move through the various parts of their lives, in survival and in beauty. You can not detain us or control us or hold us in your hands.

Let's work together as Butterflies and lovers, defenders of Butterflies, to create safety, justice, and dignity for everyone who is oppressed in our society, within and beyond borders.

Butterfly (Asian and Migrant  
Sex Workers Support Network)

April, 2016

## • Mission •

Butterfly: Asian and Migrant Sex Workers Support Network is composed of migrants, sex workers, and allies including social workers, legal professionals, and health professionals. Butterfly provides support to Asian and migrant sex workers as well as advocating for their **rights and self-determination**. The organization is founded upon the belief that sex workers are entitled to **safety, dignity and justice**. Butterfly supports all Asian and migrant sex workers, regardless of their immigration status, gender, race, or sexual orientation. We believe that Asian and migrant sex workers should receive the same respect and rights as other workers.

Butterfly 's work is about **building community** with migrant sex workers: a place where we can share love, care, laughter, and tears. Our community is what gives us the strength to support each other, resist oppression, grow together, and actualize our dreams.

## • Butterfly's Mandate: What We Do •

### **Providing support, education and information to Asian and migrant sex workers**

- Promoting safety and dignity for all sex workers, regardless of their gender, race, sexual orientation, or immigration status
- Enhancing access to health, social, labour, and legal rights and services
- Promoting equality and eliminating racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, stigma, and discrimination against Asian and migrant and sex workers
- Building support networks and promoting solidarity among sex workers to empower them to organize among themselves
- Facilitating opportunities for the voices of sex workers to be heard in society
- Advocating for the human rights of sex workers at a policy level and promoting the decriminalization of sex work

## • Who are Asian and Migrant Sex Workers? •

Asian and migrant sex workers include anyone who identifies as Asian and/or a migrant (meaning they move from one place to another, whether across state borders or within them) and engages in any form of sexual service in exchange for money, food, shelter, materials, resources, or safety. Asian and migrant sex workers may have a variety of legal statuses in regard to their citizenship. For example, they may be citizens, permanent residents, refugees, or people with no legal status in Canada. They may also be residing in Canada on visas, including student visas, tourist visas, or work visas for jobs which are not related to sex work. Migrant sex workers may work at escort agencies, massage parlours, dance clubs, dungeons, outdoor areas, or private residences.

## • Why It Matters •

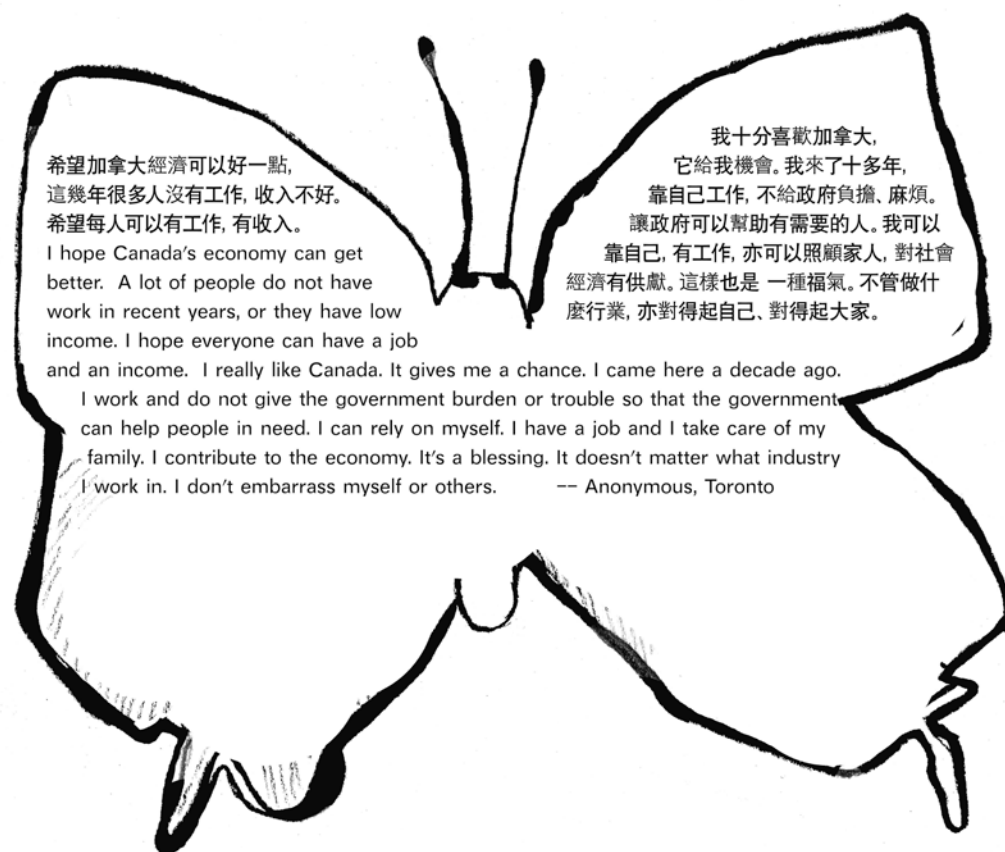
Migrant sex workers are oppressed, regulated, and marginalized by neoliberal globalization, patriarchy, and imperialist constructions of borders and citizenship. Despite these factors, as well as the fact that many migrant sex workers are politicized and socially active at a grassroots level, they are generally excluded from social movements. **Migrant sex workers are targeted for violence not only by clients, but also by law enforcement, often under the name of “protection from trafficking”.** Policies which allege to help or protect migrant sex workers are often nothing more than racist, anti-migration, and anti-sex worker agendas, thinly veiled by paternalistic language. Policies surrounding the criminalization of sex work and migration present nearly insurmountable hurdles to accessing information, vital services such as health care, protection under the justice system, and other basic human rights. In this climate, it is nearly impossible for migrant sex workers to make their voices heard in terms of advocacy work and the policy making process, meaning that **these laws and policies are enforced with no input**

**from the people who are directly affected by them.**

Migrant sex workers face not only the criminalization and stigmatization which are directed at sex workers, but also racism and discriminatory immigration policy. **Violence against Asian and Migrant sex workers is a direct result of Canada's repressive laws and widespread climate of hatred towards sex workers and sex work.** Because Asian and Migrant sex workers must often keep a low profile to avoid the risks of detection by police as well as social stigma and discrimination, they are left in a situation of isolation which makes them more likely to be targeted for violence. For example, one sex worker involved with Butterfly described being robbed four times in a week. Another sex worker was sexually assaulted three times in one week. More than 60 % of migrant sex workers have experienced different forms of violence, yet they are not able to call the police as they are afraid that they or their co-workers will be arrested. Some women have been seriously injured, yet cannot freely access medical help or

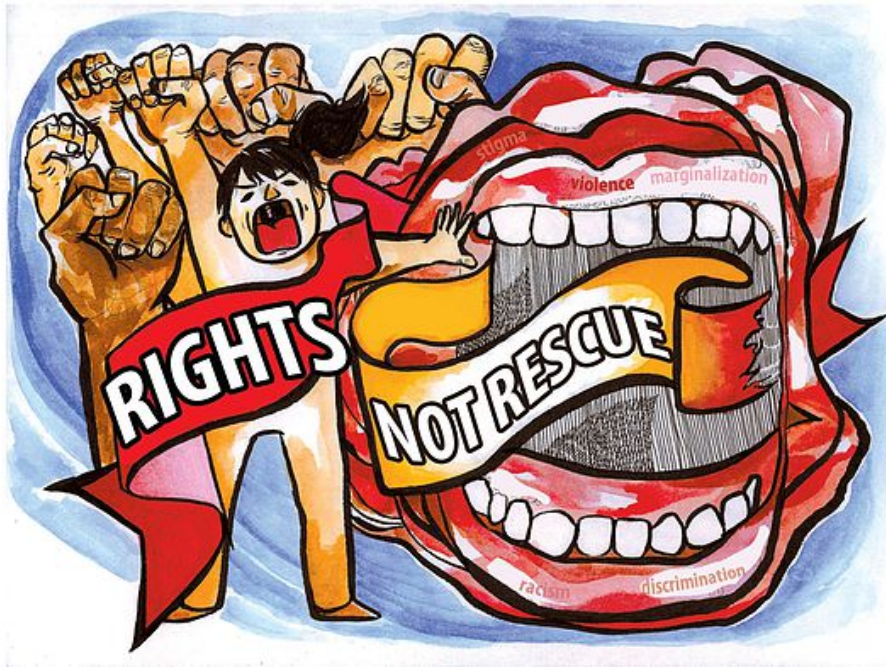
legal recourse. **In the past two years, three Asian sex workers have been killed in the Hamilton and Mississauga area of Ontario.** Even sex workers who have immigration status live with the fear that seeking help will increase the attention and surveillance on their workplace, putting them or their co-workers at heightened risk. It is very difficult for migrant sex workers to access legal support, since there are few legal professionals who have experience dealing with the complex intersections between criminal law (both sex work and trafficking laws) and immigration law.

Although the city of Toronto has technically adopted Access Without Fear policies (meaning that public officials in schools, hospitals, and other establishments are no longer allowed to report the immigration status of service users), many gaps and inconsistencies exist in the implementation of these policies. In addition, the criminalization of sex work means that sex workers are reported and surveilled despite the reforms.





## • Harms Created by Anti-Trafficking Investigations •



In Canada, millions of dollars and high levels of resources are designated to anti-trafficking investigations. Under the guise of “protecting vulnerable women”, anti-trafficking campaigns increase the levels of immigration enforcement at federal, provincial, and municipal levels, thereby increasing the rates of arrest, deportation, and detention faced by migrant sex workers. While on the surface the idea of fighting human trafficking sounds like something positive, these campaigns often do more harm than good, functioning as thinly veiled excuses for tightening border control. **Migrant sex workers who are caught up in anti-trafficking**

**investigations are labeled as victims, yet treated as criminals.** They are often charged, detained, deported, and denied entry back into Canada as well as denied the means of income which they relied on. If migrant sex workers say that they have indeed been abused or exploited in the sex industry they are often deported anyhow, meaning that they there will be no legal consequences for their perpetrators as they cannot testify. Again, this means that migrant sex workers have no way of reporting abuse against them, since it means that they could lose their freedom, be deported, and lose their income. In this way, **campaigns against**

**human trafficking can actually increase exploitation and vulnerability instead of fighting it.** Having immigration status does not necessarily protect workers from harm by anti-trafficking campaigns, as even those who have immigration status face harassment and surveillance by municipal, provincial and federal authorities.

Anti-trafficking investigations also give police more justification for entering the spaces where sex workers live and work. **Sex workers have reported that they have been sexually, verbally, and physically assaulted by police.** Some sex workers reported that the police make up evidence in order to lay charges or write bylaw tickets, including lying in court regarding undercover investigations. Four women said that their money was taken away by police without record, in amounts ranging from \$2000 to \$50,000. While the media plays upon stereotypes of violent pimps and traffickers abusing migrant sex workers, **many sex workers have said that it is actually the police who they fear most.**

We urge the public to pay close attention to the ways that anti-trafficking measures and repressive legal policies impact sex workers. The climate of fear created by repressive laws and anti-trafficking campaigns means that the sex industry is driven further underground, resulting in more sex workers choosing work locations that are **less visible and offer fewer safety protections.**



Public education of the harm of anti-trafficking campaign: exhibition and performance at the AGO.

## • Sex Work as a Form of Resistance to Oppression Rather than Oppression Itself •

Many people think that sex work is nothing more than a form of exploitation. **Sex work is not recognized as a legitimate job, regardless of how sex workers themselves view their work.** In today's global labour market, racialized, poor, and working-class women and trans people often do not have access to regular channels of labour. Free trade agreements and other economic policies mean that the local labour markets in many regions, particularly those in southern countries, are severely impoverished. Traveling abroad to work can be a way of earning a better income than one would make in one's home country, even for people with professional credentials. However,

**Canada and many other wealthier countries severely restrict migrant people's work options**, limiting them to exploitative, unsafe, low waged, and temporary jobs, often in the agricultural or domestic sectors, on the basis of their citizenship status. Even people who have professional qualifications and post-secondary education are not valued as skilled workers by Canada, which refuses to acknowledge foreign credentials.

Sex work can be a way of avoiding the exploitation of unequal and discriminatory job markets. **Dominant ideas of sex workers as bad, immoral, or victimized, paint over the**

**complexity of people's lives and the choices which they make given their available options.** For those who are restricted in their opportunities to work and live in Canada, and who may not be able to access regular channels of work, sex work can be a way of gaining more freedom and independence. The same goes for those who do not want to work in an exploitative environment (such as long working hours, low wages, and bad working conditions), or need to save finances to leave an oppressive marital relationship. **For many people, sex work is the best available option in terms of flexibility, payment and working conditions.**



Art exhibition with photographs by sex workers, shedding light on different aspects of their lives.



*Dominant ideas of sex workers as bad, immoral, or victimized, paint over the complexity of people's lives and the choices which they make given their available options.*



## • Working Report •

We aim to fulfill our mandate through the following:

### Outreach and 24/7 Hotline

Through our outreach activities, Butterfly has been in contact with more than 200 sex workers in the past year alone. **We reach sex workers through our 24-hour hotline, social media outreach, newsletters and publications, and in-person visits to massage parlors, indoor establishments, and hotels, where sex workers are working.** In addition to the in-person outreach which we regularly provide at St. Stephen's Community House in Toronto, we have also reached migrant sex workers in Montreal, Vancouver, St. Catharines, Saskatchewan, Halifax, Winnipeg, Peterborough, Niagara, and Ottawa. Our outreach activities allow us to build relationships with sex workers and provide direct social, legal, and health supports. **Our hotline is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, so that workers may report crisis situations at any time and we can respond quickly,** such as when they are arrested or harassed by police or assaulted by clients. Our bi-monthly newsletter gives sex workers access to information related to their work, health, safety, and culture, as well providing a platform where they can share their stories.

### Workshops, Trainings, and Networking

Butterfly offers a variety of workshops for migrant sex workers including Know-Your-Rights Classes, Legal Classes, Massage Skills Enhancement Classes, 'English is Sexy' Language Classes, Women's Health Classes, Self-Defense Classes, and Art Workshops. We also organize social events for migrant sex workers including New Year parties, dinner and dance parties, and other get-togethers where migrant sex workers can meet, socialize, and network in a non-stigmatizing environment.

Our workshops and trainings are geared towards **helping sex workers increase their capacity and gain the tools to resist oppression in their work places and improve their working conditions.**

Our workshops and gatherings provide an opportunity to share information, from updates on recent Canadian news, to information on skin care products, to new developments in sex work policy. Through creating spaces where migrant sex workers can network, we enhance their ability to support each other and build collective solidarity. **Through building community, many migrant sex workers can feel a sense of home and belonging.**

### Legal information and Support

Migrant sex workers are in a unique and difficult legal situation, as they are caught in the intersection of different bodies of law: criminal law, immigration law, municipal law, labour law, and sometimes family law. **Very few legal professionals are familiar with the situation of migrant sex workers, or experienced in dealing with these complex legal intersections.** Butterfly has worked with Stella (a Montreal-based sex workers' organization) to develop informational resources on the legal situation of migrant sex workers, *Immigration Status and Sex Work*, and *Working in Canada Without Canadian Citizenship*. These resources help migrant sex workers, as well as helping service providers to understand the complexity of the issue. These resources are currently being translated into different languages in order to make

them more accessible. Butterfly is also working with the Migrant Sex Workers Project to develop the 'Know Your Rights' comic book for migrant sex workers.

In addition to offering legal classes, Butterfly also provides direct legal assistance to sex workers in different cities. We provide information about laws and legal procedures, as well as crisis support when migrant sex workers are arrested. In these situations, **we work quickly to find lawyers, access information regarding the case, advocate for the workers every step of the way, and contact their friends and family.** We visit and have phone calls with workers who are detained, as well as help them buy plane tickets to go back home, help them pack, and gather their personal items and valuables to bring to the airport or detention center. We also accompany sex workers to court proceedings to provide support for them in the courtroom, represent them in detention review, help them to find bond persons, and assist in finding community resources, such as shelter and social services, if they are released. When sex workers are deported, we continue to support them even after deportation, helping them with housing, finances, coping with personal issues, and providing long-distance English classes when they return to their countries of origin.



## • Working Report •

### Medical Support

Accessing medical care can be difficult for migrant sex workers, due to **discrimination against their citizenship status and means of income**, as well as language barriers which can make it difficult to communicate health concerns with a medical provider. Butterfly provides health information, health classes, and accompaniment to medical appointments to provide support and advocacy for sex workers, including crisis situations. We also develop networks and partnerships with medical services providers such as Toronto Public Health, the Immigrant Women's Health Centre, the FCJ Refugee Centre, Queen West Community Health Centre and other clinics, to enhance the services which migrant sex workers can access without discrimination.

### Personal and Emotional Support

Butterfly provides emotional and personal support to sex workers, including counseling, help with handling relationship and family issues, and support for the families of sex workers. **We use a sex-work-affirmative approach to recognize that sex work is valid work, and decrease the guilt and shame which many people feel as a result of social pressures and negative stereotypes.** Conventional counseling services are not generally accessible to many migrant sex workers, and also often do not have staff who are knowledgeable about issues of sex work and able to approach the issues faced by sex workers in an informed, sensitive, and non-judgmental way.

### Public Education

Butterfly fights against the widespread discrimination faced by migrant sex workers, and aims to help society understand their situation. We have developed a number of projects and publications to bring the voices of migrant sex workers to public attention, including ***Stop the Harm from Anti-Trafficking Policies & Campaigns: Support Sex Workers' Rights, Justice, and Dignity***. In 2015, we worked with the Migrant Sex Workers Project to

organize a conference at Ryerson University, ***Migrant Sex Workers Justice and The Trouble with "Anti-Trafficking"; Research, Activism, Art***. The conference was attended by over 120 participants including sex workers, activists, academics, legal professionals, journalists, social workers, government officials, and community members. Butterfly has also facilitated more than 50 presentations in conferences, community events, and universities.

**Butterfly Voices** is a community art project developed with artist Alvis Choi to collect artworks and stories created and shared by migrant sex workers. Through the empowering acts of first-person storytelling and art making, the exhibits offer refreshing lenses for the public to gain understanding of the diversity of the lives of migrant sex workers. The first iteration was exhibited at Ryerson University in 2015 and the second iteration was presented at the Whippersnapper Gallery as part of the *Mayworks Festival of Working People and the Arts* in 2016.



### Advocacy

Butterfly uses a justice-based framework to advocate for the rights of migrant sex workers. Our advocacy work includes lobbying, coalition building with other activist groups, submitting policy papers to parliament, Ontario Women's Directorate, presenting at conferences (such as *National Forum on Human Trafficking*), conducting community-based research, and public education. Butterfly works with groups including the Canadian

Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform, Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, Maggie's: Toronto Sex Workers' Action, the Migrant Sex Workers Project, POWER, Stella, STRUT, and other sex worker and allied organizations. Together we fight for the decriminalization of sex work and an end to the harms of anti-trafficking policy, with an emphasis on ending the Canadian Border Services Agency's involvement in anti-trafficking investigations. We also advocate for migrant and labour rights in all sectors, working in organizations such as No One is Illegal Toronto, the Workers Action Centre, the Migrant Workers' Alliance for Change, and others.

### Leadership Building

**We prioritize the voices of sex workers themselves**, and strive to build up their capacity to become leaders in the migrant sex workers' justice movement and other social movements. Migrant sex workers in Canada have already formed a legal and advocacy

*We prioritize the voices of the workers, and strive to build up their capacity to take action and fight for safety, dignity and justice.*

committee to fight for their legal rights and justice. We also develop workshops to help sex workers understand oppression (racism, sexism and imperialism), and overcome the internalization of oppression which many people experience as a result of negative stereotypes, discrimination, and stigma. Building leadership capacity means enabling sex workers to take action to change oppressive situations and fight for **safety, dignity and justice**.



## • Journey of Butterflies •

### *Journey of Blue*

International Student in Ontario

After graduating from university in Asia, Blue decided to move to Canada to further develop herself and her education by attending a university in Ontario. Blue's first year of study went alright, she worked part time and received financial support from her family to help cover her expenses, which were up to 45,000 dollars a year. After Blue's first year in Canada her family back in Asia experienced an unexpected financial crisis and were no longer able to provide her the same kind of support. Blue's program requirements only allowed her to work 10 hours a week. On top of that, her experience with racism and language barrier meant that she could only find work making minimum wage. Also, Blue needed to spend a lot of time volunteering and interning in order to gain the experience necessary to find a job in her field, especially as a woman in a male dominated profession.

Blue started working in a massage parlour where she could have work flexibility. She felt that this allowed her to better meet her financial needs and balance her school and internship.

In 2015 there was a raid in Blue's place of work. Police barged in, and without notice, opened the door of Blue's service room and found her cleaning up. Although Blue wasn't doing anything wrong or illegal, they ordered her to stay still and not move while they searched the building. Blue's boss asked the police officers if they had a warrant, and told them that they could not continue searching without one. The police officers became angry about being challenged, failed to show a warrant and continued searching the parlour. The police failed to find any evidence of illegal activity.

After completing the search the police officers asked Blue for her immigration documents. Blue showed the officers her working permit stating that she can work in Canada legally. Dissatisfied, the police called CBSA. While waiting for CBSA to arrive three police officers

cornered Blue and continued to interrogate her. They asked her questions like, why she came to Canada and why she worked in a massage parlour. Blue felt overwhelmed, insulted and started to cry. She repeated to the officers that she wasn't doing anything illegal. The police made her sit still for almost two hours and would not let her move, not even to get a coat to cover herself. When CBSA arrived they continued to interrogate Blue and would not allow her to make a telephone call.

The police told Blue to leave the massage parlour immediately and warned her that if she returns to work she will get arrested and deported. Confused, afraid and harassed, Blue left without knowing what law she had broken.

*Blue has helped Butterfly raise some important questions about migrant concerns.*

After the incident Blue was too afraid of law enforcement to return to work in a massage parlour, and instead, she started to work indoors where she felt like she needed to provide full sex services. Blue preferred to work in the massage parlour because she felt like she had more control, more agency to choose who she provided services to, and more ability to negotiate with clients. While most of the work that she did was providing massages, she offered hand-job services to some clients in order to supplement her income. Blue felt that in her new environment full sex services were more expected. The new working environment is much more stressful for her.

Blue updated her working permit at the beginning of this year. The updated version of the permit restricts her from working in employment of any sex work related activities. Given the added risk

this places on Blue's immigration status, Blue had no place to turn after recently being robbed by a client. She felt unable to seek support from law enforcement based on fears of deportation in relation to breaching the conditions of her work permit. Blue found herself in a downward spiral, caught in the web between well-intentioned law making, and the actual execution of the law and the reality of living.

Before Blue encountered Butterfly she was unaware of what rights she might have, and of the laws surrounding sex work and immigration. She had not known who she could ask or talk to about these issues. Since then, Butterfly has helped provide Blue with some information about the law and her legal rights. She now has a place to go and ask questions, she keeps a lawyer's number on her person, and has learned ways to strategically answer questions from law enforcement in a way that protects herself.

Blue on the other hand has helped Butterfly raise some important questions about migrant concerns. Her lived experience has helped Butterfly shape services to be appropriate in meeting the needs of migrant sex workers. There are no existing resources to help tackle the issues that many migrants face. Working through real life challenges with migrants and engaging them in the process of problem solving allows for the development of material that will benefit the broader community and folks in similar situations. Blue has contributed to the development of Stella's document, *Working in Canada without Citizenship*. In order to increase the English skills of migrant sex workers in relation to the law, Butterfly is working with Migrant Sex Workers Project to complete a publication in comic book format with legal information to support women in better protecting themselves from the harms of anti-trafficking laws and enforcement.

## • Journey of Butterflies •

### *Journey of Cookie*



This is a story about trauma and resistance. It hurts to hear it and it may make you angry. But it is an important story that needs to be told. This is Cookie's story as told to Butterfly...

The recounting of her story begins in Asia before her name was Cookie, when she was a teenager and was sexually assaulted by her family members. At 18, she ran away from the unsafety of home and into uncertainty. She met someone who used their relationship to force her underground and into the sex industry. Using religion and the lethal stigma of prostitutes, they shamed her into isolation and she was unable to access any support from her family or friends for the next few years.

By chance she met a man whom she fell deeply in love with. Motivated by love, and the soul or death urgency to end this on-going trauma, she managed to escape, leave her home country and flee to Canada.

Cookie entered Canada with a valid visa which, as you can imagine, she valued dearly. She therefore *never* overstayed and *never* missed a single immigration appointment for the next 10 years of her life as a new Canadian. She found work, hard work, in kitchens,

restaurants, as a driver, courier, and cashier, and she paid her taxes. She saved her money until she could buy herself and her now husband a house. This all-American dream built on hard work and hope however, turned into an all too common nightmare of domestic violence. Over time her husband's violence got worse and worse, and with no official status (even after all this time she had not yet been given permanent residence), she didn't know where to turn to for support. Knowing her position and how vulnerable she was, her husband stole all her money, kicked her out of her house and cancelled the sponsorship all before she could gain permanent residency.

Desperate for help, she contacted a lawyer. The negligence of this unsympathetic lawyer started a lava flow that would blaze through the last trees standing in her forest reserve. While in his trust, her immigration paperwork was missing information and not filed properly resulting in her missing a reporting date for the first time in 10 years. Up until then she had always, always reported diligently and on time. Now after losing her home and self-built security, her post traumatic stress is understandably triggered, causing her mental health to become increasingly more unstable.

Now homeless and struggling daily for survival, she willingly seeks out and becomes involved in the sex industry. Despite always having had her working visa renewed, she is suddenly given a deportation order to leave Canada.

She enters her meeting with immigration in a state of panic, and during the interview she breaks down emotionally and tells the Canadian border security agent that she'll kill herself if they send her back to Asia. Upon hearing this they immediately detain her and unbelievably her desperate emotional plea for help lands her in prison.

This prison is a few hours away from the city, away from all her friends and any hope of comfort or support. Making phone calls is difficult here because they have to be made on a landline that most people don't use anymore. Now, also navigating psychiatric abuse, as she's forced to take psych medications, she's become deeply depressed and unable to communicate. Being in prison is in effect forcing her to relive her former imprisonment and forced prostitution. Over the next month she's procedurally stripped-searched three times just to meet with her lawyer and each time relives the trauma of being raped and assaulted. During this time, she felt violated and that she was not being treated with respect or even as a human.

After a long and torturous month, she's finally able to get bail but all of her documents have been taken away, including her driver's license, making it impossible to work and again imposing every barrier to her accessing a means of survival.

Despite having been so heavily traumatized by violence in her home country, the Canadian government won't listen to her story and continues to make the situation worse for her. She devoutly follows their procedural hoops, only to feel discriminated against on the basis of mental illness. Rather than being treated like a victim of domestic violence, she is made to feel like a criminal.

Cookie was eligible to apply for refugee status when she first came to Canada, but she didn't want to be re-traumatized by the process of retelling her horrific story. Of course in the end she relived her trauma even more every time she tried to tell CBSA, only to not be believed. Feeling violated again each time she stood naked waiting to be strip-searched. Assaulted again. She doesn't necessarily want to identify as a victim.

## *Journey of Cookie*

She feels that the immigration department and the government refuse to listen and do not believe her. Throughout this ordeal, the one support contact she trusts to help and believe her was Butterfly, because she heard that the founder had worked with a sex worker led advocacy group in her home country. Despite not having reached out before when first hearing of them, as soon as she was arrested she made two phone calls: one to a lawyer and one to Butterfly.

Butterfly would make the long drive (of a few hours) to see her in the detention centre where she would cry every time for nearly the entire 30 minutes they had for the visit. Butterfly helped to organize a psychologist and sex worker group in her home country to support her in the event that she is deported. She met with them again after being released and was invited to join a Butterfly social event where she could meet other workers and supporters who would listen with compassion to

her story. And now you too have held space to listen and hear her story. She wants you to hear it because she knows she's not the only one.

Could any of us stand this much hurt? Do you feel outraged and angry? How do we find enough compassion to hold on to all of this truth?

She's out on bail and appealing to stay in Canada on compassionate grounds. Her husband still has all of her hard earned money and her house but, like most survivors of domestic violence, she feels it would be too emotionally distressing to go after him.

Shown here (at the *Butterfly Voices* art exhibition) are the comics she drew while in the detention centre along with the text to encourage herself. **This is an act of resilience, and resilience is what will be necessary for us to hold each other's stories long enough to share them, and long enough to fight this system of injustice.**

Cookie needs you to tell her compelling story of trauma survived and resilience required so that its power can be used to expose a system that traumatized her further when what she truly needed was compassion, resources and support. **Let us expose what has to change so that people are treated with dignity and adequate care.**

**Because it is a disgrace to pose as "helping the victim," while further victimizing someone who is courageously doing her best when no hands are offered.**



## *Journey of Sun*

My name is Ah Sun. Elene impressed me a few years back when she came to my place of work one day with a glowing friendly smile. She introduced herself as a member of Butterfly, the Asian and Migrant Sex Workers Network. Every visit, she always bring useful gifts and literatures. She patiently teaches us the knowledge and points out the dangers experienced by fellow sex-workers. She tells us our rights and teaches us the action to take in the event when facing prosecution. She told us how to avoid situations that would put sex-workers in adverse surrounding.

Thanks to Butterfly – the only non-profit organization for Asian Sex-workers and especially to the founder of Butterfly, a lot of under-privileged sex-workers of all

nationalities have received social and legal assistance. She had helped a lot of Sex-workers in Hong Kong in the past. She expanded the service to Canada recently so we all should be very grateful to her passion and dedication.

Providing support to sex-workers is a lot more difficult than any other field. They have to face the opposition from law-enforcement, religious as well as difficulties of organizing and empowering sex-workers. Only dedication, passion and preservation like Elene can succeed. I dearly admire her generosity and cheerful personality.

I have personally benefitted from Butterfly. During the time I was prosecuted and deported, Elene spent time and resources and helped me with

no reservation. I am deeply indebted and I sincerely pray she will receive your support and encouragement to expand the service to fellow sex-workers. The injustice, suppression and prosecution we all suffered will need Butterfly and Elene as our savior.

**Let us be united, fight for our rights, and oppose prejudice and injustice towards sex-workers. Let us pray for peace, harmony and equality for all trades including the sex-trade which is one form of profession.**

**Ah Sun, a migrant sex worker who is pretty and strong**



## • Sharing from Our Members and Allies •

My experience with Butterfly is that it has unconditionally helped those who really needed help. It has allowed us, those living in a not so friendly world, to see a ray of hope, and to feel even warmth.

The volunteers from Butterfly are sincere and involved in each of our sometimes confused lives. We learn together, as they fathom our world and give us assistance that is solid, practical and real. There are so many of us who have benefited from their advice and help, bringing us back from a world that could be a labyrinth to us, so much so that there is a real reason for Butterfly to continue to exist.

**Shawn Yuan**

This is how I feel about Butterfly. It has been nearly a year now that I started joining in the activities. Every time that I see Butterfly there, I would feel that somebody understands me. She is so approachable, and she'd listen and accepts me. I would feel somebody respects me. I'd want to pour out my feelings – it's just like going home. I really enjoy participating in these activities. I certainly hope there will be more opportunities in future for me to fly into the embrace of Butterfly.

**Liza, a massage parlour worker**

I came across the good work of Butterfly (Asian and Migrant Sex Workers Network) about 2 years ago through a relative who had benefitted from this social support service spearheaded by the founder of Butterfly. I am extremely impressed by their objective and mandate. I have been involved with the Canadian Refugee Program for nearly 40 years. Our prime Minister Justin Trudeau demonstrated to the world of the generosity of Canada to potential immigrants. Ironically, Bill C-36 in reality is just the opposite towards refugees and immigrants who are already in Canada.

The current Bill C-36 is supposed to legalize the rights of Sex Worker and to regulate this industry but in fact, it has caused confusion on how law enforcement can be implemented by the Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act introduced by the PC Government as a quick-fix which now endangered the safety of the Sex-workers. The results is police will only act on complaints rather than pro-active enforcement. The complaints are always from individuals discriminating the sex-workers causing harassments and fear to the ingenuous law-abiding workers. The sex-workers will be too timid to make complaints even when they are threatened or victimized for fear of detention, prosecution and possibly deportation.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and the Liberal Government has promised to repeal this Bill before they defeated the Harper PC Government. I eagerly wait for the day the Liberal Government will bring in new legislations to take into the fundamental human right of these workers for access to health and social support services such as Butterfly.

**William, a Concerned Citizen**

Butterfly is a network of Asian migrant sex workers. Butterfly has a tireless community organizer who refers migrants to health and legal services that do not discriminate on the basis of immigration status or sex work status. She does outreach to hundreds of workers, and looks after their individual needs, including helping people when they have been detained or undergoing the process of deportation. Since she is one of the few people doing this outreach on a voluntary basis, she is often overwhelmed with the volume of inquiries and contacts, especially when there is no funding for this kind of work. In the face of all the harms of the anti-trafficking movement, Butterfly is one of the few organizations that actually listens and looks after the needs of migrants engaged in sex trades, without judgment, and as such, it is a truly unique and necessary project, led by an amazing spirit, that honors the dignity and safety of others in order to fight for justice.

**Kate Zen is a community organizer for migrant labour rights**, recently moved from New York City to Toronto. She is grateful to be part of Butterfly and the Migrant Sex Workers Project.

My involvement with Butterfly started with working with Elene Lam to come up with a Chinese name for the organization and designing its logo. It has been over a year and I'm slowly becoming a part of it – because this work of relationship building is inherently slow. I often ask, "who else would offer this kind of constant, necessary support to migrant sex workers in Toronto and at the same time engage workers in the organizing?" I cannot now imagine Toronto without the work of Butterfly. Butterfly has really shown that there is a way to be inclusive of sex workers who are most marginalized and brought together many strong yet isolated individuals in the city with a sense of home and belonging.

**Alvis Choi , community artist and volunteer**

Chairperson of the Chinese Canadian National Council Toronto Chapter

Within the one short year since 2015 that Butterfly has come into existence, its achievements are for all to see. It has done substantial work in fighting for the rights of Asian sex workers and in establishing certain social justice.

With no government funding, and no stable source of income for the small organisation providing social service, Butterfly could not have operated so well without the generosity of the public, the support of volunteers and coordinating organisations. But perhaps much more than that, Butterfly owes its strength to its Founder and Executive Director, whose unyielding faith gave her courage and tenacity to fight against all odds, to question authority, while her leadership and genuine care for marginalized communities set the tone for this organisation.

I am sincerely honoured and proud to be her friend and community partner. I'd like to take this opportunity to express my deepest respect and best wishes to her and the future of Butterfly.

**Nancy Sun, Community Health Worker, HIV/AIDS Program**

St. Stephen's Community House

The biggest success of a social movement is measured by the number of people that rise up and join the struggle. When migrant sex workers in Canada most recently started organizing under the wings of Butterfly, it was powerful and poignant. Migrant sex workers in Canada are over-policed and over-regulated, they fall into the jaws of anti-trafficking initiatives that co-opt their stories to support racist claims about Asian sex workers and harmful anti-immigration policies. Fly high, Butterfly! We support you and are grateful for all of the work we can do together against racist immigration policy and damaging criminalization for migrants. Thank you for the energy that you bring to the Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform.

**Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform**

[www.sexworklawreform.com](http://www.sexworklawreform.com)

### **Butterfly & the Legal Network**

Butterfly (Asian and Migration Sex Workers Support Network) has changed the tenor of conversations concerning migrant sex work in Ontario. Thanks to Butterfly, the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network has a fuller understanding of the human rights abuses inflicted against migrant sex workers, particularly in the course of misguided campaigns to address trafficking. We are honoured to have contributed to Butterfly's resource *Stop the Harm from Anti-Trafficking Policies & Campaigns: Support Sex Workers' Rights, Justice, and Dignity*.

**Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network**

POWER is an Ottawa based organizations that focuses on the rights of sex workers (see our website [www.powerottawa.ca](http://www.powerottawa.ca)). As it stands now, laws, policies and rhetoric on human trafficking are of utmost importance when we consider issues like the human and labour rights as well as the safety and well being of sex workers, and especially migrant sex workers, considering the deliberate conflation of sex work and trafficking.

POWER stands for social justice, for the protection of workers' rights, for movement building and for addressing the reasons why some people are unable to access police protection when facing violence, among many other things. This conflation and what has come of it has had tremendously negative consequences on sex workers and migrant workers in our city and worldwide and so, we have been learning from and supporting the work of groups like Butterfly who offer tremendous leadership on the matter. It is clear to us that a strong Butterfly will elevate us all.

**POWER**

Congratulations to Butterfly Voices! The expression of art provides an outlet in which individuals can shape their own narratives in creative and empowering ways. Art created by marginalized communities are inherently political – its very existence challenges the dominant discourse of the human experience. We hope these works expand the perception of migrant sex workers and offer alternative ways to understand their lives.

Since 2013, the Chinese Canadian National Council - Toronto Chapter (CCNCTO) has supported Butterfly and we will continue to offer our support to the project's goals and addressing discrimination towards Chinese sex workers in Toronto.

In under two years, Butterfly has changed the landscape of sex worker advocacy and support in Toronto. Through their amazing outreach work they have connected with hundreds of migrant sex workers who otherwise may not have had access to support services and safer sex education and materials. Butterfly has challenged dominant ideas about migrant sex workers – not only in the mainstream – but within the sex workers movement in general. An integral voice within the movement, and always inspiring to work with. May these be the first of many more years of mutual support and collaboration. Here's to Butterfly!

#### **Maggie's - Toronto Sex Workers' Action Project**

In the past year, Butterfly has been doing incredible work to try to reverse this horrific trend. Butterfly's work is *\*critical\** and life saving because they are the only direct connection to migrants in the sex trade locally – and increasingly nationally. They have developed and published legal information for migrant sex workers, provided legal training to arm migrant sex workers with information about their rights with law enforcement, they have built networks of support with other organizations to advocate for migrant sex worker rights, founded a hotline and offered support and advocacy to migrant sex workers who've experienced violence.

They continue to build up the capacity of migrant sex workers to participate in sex workers movement and other social movements, to develop the leadership of migrant sex workers, to organize migrant sex workers to advocate for their rights including the development of a campaign against the harms of anti-trafficking. This builds on the work that Butterfly has been doing since 2014 to build trusting relationships with migrant sex workers.

#### **Migrant Sex Workers Project**

No One Is Illegal Toronto is in solidarity with the organizers of Butterfly and the Migrant Sex Workers Project in our collective work toward justice for migrant people. We recognize that migrants in the sex trades occupy a heightened level of stigma, precarity and susceptibility to state violence because of racist and patriarchal laws around migration, labour, sex and criminalization. We are excited and inspired by the important work of Butterfly as we work together toward a world where migrant sex workers' labour is recognized and they are treated with respect and dignity.

#### **No one is Illegal Toronto**

On behalf of St. Stephen's Community House, I am pleased and honored to be here and share my support of the Butterfly Project and our partnership. It is very exciting to have a Project like Butterfly in the community connecting with individuals at risk of isolation and providing opportunity to build community and create greater access to resources and support. We are so pleased to be a part of this incredible Project and our Community Health Worker, Nancy Sun who will be actively working with Butterfly, possess a wealth of knowledge of HIV health and education is looking forward to the opportunity of providing HIV support to the women Butterfly will reach. I look forward to all the amazing things to come!

**Gab Laurence, Coordinator, Toronto Community Addiction Team (TCAT)**  
St. Stephen's Community House



The sex worker community in Canada is small, but we have a long way to travel to see one another. Butterflies, however, can move easily across the country. So, when the beautiful Butterflies arrived at Stella we were overjoyed! We were so honoured to have them join us on outreach, visiting Asian and migrant sex workers in Montreal and creating communities with us. Butterfly translated our legal documents into Chinese and helped us reach more Chinese speaking sex workers. Our relationship with Butterfly is so special to us because being based in Quebec, we are always reminded how important it is that we learn and grow across differences of language and culture.

**Stella, l'amie de Maimie, Montréal (Québec)**

[www.chezstella.org](http://www.chezstella.org)

Over the last few years, members of Butterfly have proven to be very helpful in reaching the hidden population of migrant sex workers in Toronto.

Those of us who work in Health Promotion with vulnerable populations are very grateful for Butterfly's willingness to work in partnership to address critical health and legal issues of migrant sex workers.

Butterfly provided assistance in working with staff to reach out to isolated migrant sex workers, surveying them about their life situations and their opinions on legal issues relevant to their situations. This research was invaluable in developing programming and resources to better meet the needs of migrant sex workers.

When St. Stephen's staff first started outreach and attempted condom distribution in massage parlours, we found that most women would not accept condoms, for fear that the police would use possession of condoms as evidence of sex work. Their fears were grounded in fact, since municipal officials often raid massage parlours looking for evidence of sex work – arrests, charges and fines are common. Members of Butterfly helped us greatly by surveying and interviewing women working in massage parlours, to further understand their situations. As a result, we worked in partnership with Butterfly to develop programming and resources based on the input from these women. Without Butterfly, we would not have been able to build trust with women working in massage parlours and therefore not have been able to put condoms into the hands of women who need them.

Butterfly is in a unique position, representing the interests of migrant sex workers and willing to take important advocacy positions too risky for mainstream agencies. Without access to adequate funding, this essential work will not be possible.

**Randi Reynolds, Manager, Wellness Promotion Program (2000 -2015)**

St. Stephen's Community House

The Workers' Action Centre is working in solidarity with Butterfly very much supports this important organizing work with migrant sex workers. Butterfly is doing important work to support building a strong migrant workers movement in Canada. Not only is Butterfly supporting workers to deal with the criminalization of sex work but also issues of isolation, violence, immigration and working conditions. One of the most important pieces of work that Butterfly is working on is to critically challenge and ensure that policies created to deal with sex work, immigration and human trafficking represent the needs and interests of migrant sex workers and that their voice is central to this organizing.

**Workers' Action Centre**

## • Support Us •

Butterfly relies on the generous support of individuals and groups to maintain and continually develop its various initiatives, programs and activities.

**\$1000**

help fund our  
**Anti-Violence  
Program**

**\$500**

help us run  
**Empowerment  
Program**

**\$100**

support our  
**outreach to  
Asian and migrant  
sex workers**

**\$50**

support us to  
**publish health  
and legal  
information**

**\$20**

help us maintain  
**24/7 hotline  
services**

### How to donate

**Online donation via PayPal:** <http://www.butterflysw.org/#!donate/c1ghi>

**Interac E-transfer:** cswbutterfly@gmail.com

**Cheque payable to:** Butterfly (Asian and Migrant Sex Workers Support Network)

**Please contact us if you'd like to get involved or volunteer!**



### Journey of Butterflies 2016

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*“Let us be united,  
fight for our rights,  
and oppose prejudice  
and injustice towards  
sex-workers. Let us  
pray for peace,  
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for all trades including  
the sex-trade which is  
one form of  
profession.”*

*– Ah Sun*

## **About Red Umbrella**

The icon for sex workers' rights around the world. It symbolizes protection from the abuse and intolerance faced by sex workers everywhere and it is also a symbol of sex workers' strengths.

## **Butterfly**

A symbol of migration, transformation, beauty, and fortitude. It represent travelling great distances in search of a better life.



Asian and Migrant Sex Workers Support Network

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