



## Butterfly Voices

Collecting stories of migrant sex workers around the world



Butterfly, an Asian and Migrant Sex Workers Support Network based in Toronto, provides support to, and advocates for, the rights of Asian and migrant sex workers. The organization is founded upon the belief that sex workers, like all workers, are entitled to respect and basic human rights. Butterfly asserts that, regardless of their immigration status, Asian and migrant sex workers should receive the same respect and human rights as other workers.

For the Migrant Sex Workers' Justice Forum, organized by Migrant Sex Workers Project and held on May 12th, 2015 at Ryerson University in Toronto, Ontario, Butterfly invited self-identified migrant sex workers around the world to

participate in the Butterfly Voices project where we collect voices of migrant sex workers, who are often silenced because of the lack of understanding, systemic oppression, and stigma in society. Community artist Alvis Choi created an installation to showcase a collection of art and stories created and shared by migrant sex workers. Each butterfly, drawn by Toronto-based artist Sarah Mangle, was coloured and decorated by participants. Together with their responses to our call for thoughts, each butterfly represents the voice of a migrant sex worker.

We have received over 40 submissions from more than 26 migrant sex workers that are based in Toronto and other cities such as Berlin, Montreal, and countries such as Scotland. The installation was appreciated at the Forum which was attended by over 120 participants including sex workers, sex worker rights activists, academics, legal professionals, journalists, social workers, government officials, artists, and community members. Through the empowering acts of first-person storytelling and art making, the exhibits offer refreshing lenses for the public to gain understanding in the diversity of the lives of migrant sex workers.

We recognize that making space for migrant sex workers to speak for themselves in a critical and foundational part of our activism. Each of the submission we received has a significant voice and impact in the reduction and ultimately removal of stigma of migrant sex workers. We give gratitude to each and every migrant sex worker who contributed their thoughts and stories, Migrant Sex Workers Project who supported this project, as well as those who attended the Forum on May 12th. With the success of this first phase of Butterfly Voices, we aim to continue to create empowering processes for migrant sex workers to engage in the conversation of migrant sex workers' rights. Butterfly Voices continues to seek for your support and contribution with the goal to grow into a larger scale exhibition in May 2016.

With this in mind, we invite you to enjoy the outcome of the first phase of Butterfly Voices.

*Butterfly Voices is supported by Migrant Sex Workers Project.*

*Photo: Installation at the Migrant Sex Workers' Justice Forum, at Ryerson University, Toronto.*



## EXCERPTS OF RESPONSES

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"When we immigrate, we bring the best of us, our capacities of development, our potential of surviving and desire to built positive and courageous communities. Sharing our culture, and educating thru the diversity.

As a tras woman who already transitioned, being a butterfly became a big challenge. To sex work, was my decision just as that moment when I decided to be free and fight against gender oppression, transphobia, exclusion, discrimination, and the possibility to lose important relationships.

Dedicated and sensible, not really, butterflies can be resilient and brave." -- Betty, Montreal

Wishes: "I would like to see my family again

I want to live without the constant fear of police

I want to come out of hiding and be respected for the work I do and the person I am" -- Sofia, Scotland

"It gives me economical stability, which is very important to me, as I am from very poor family.

It gives me the possibility to choose as my partner someone I really love, and not someone who can maintain me and my family." -- Katia, Europe

Wishes: "Free migration, no borders, no nations. Decolonization and reparations to indigenous peoples. Trans liberation. Full Communism."

"Sex work does not help me achieve my dream, it helps me survive under capitalism. Activism and art and creating helps me achieve my dream.

Migrant sex workers are a huge part of the economy, and a huge part of the cultural scene. Migrant sex workers are artists, musicians, service workers and much more. I don't know and don't care how we contribute to clients beyond getting them off." -- Hexe, Berlin

"It creates an alternative stream of untaxed income. This income can be used for the advancement of that individual (skills training and education) which in turn will enable her to be in a position where she can make decisions and contributions that will uplift her community. Sex workers cheer up their clients which reduces violent crimes, stress and increases longevity. Society will be better with less stressful people." -- Peta, Toronto

Excerpts of Reponses translated from Chinese /

"I wish for good health and an income, bringing no burden to society. I hope to provide good services to my clients and society with my strengths." -- May, Toronto

"I work and do not give the government burden or trouble so that the government can help people in need. I can rely on myself. I have a job and I take care of my family. I contribute to the economy. It's a blessing. It doesn't matter what industry I work in. I don't embarrass myself or others." -- Anonymous

"Each butterfly is the soul of a flower. Butterflies follow flowers. Our sisters are scattered in Canada like blossoming flowers. We found our soul with our encounter with Butterfly. We become brighter, more beautiful flowers." -- M, Toronto

"I want to travel around Canada. I've been here for many years but every day I'm busy with work. I have had no chance to see Canada. Life in Canada is not easy." -- Anonymous

"I am not young. I'm over 50 years old. Some clients think I'm old and don't want to see me. But I let go of it and do as much I am offered. I don't care so much about how much business I have as long as I can maintain a life." -- Anonymous

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WORKS CREATED BY SELF-IDENTIFIED  
MIGRANT SEX WORKERS



Photo: Audience at the Migrant Sex Workers' Justice Forum appreciating the art pieces created by migrant sex workers.

"One day, I happen to see a butterfly fluttering in the window. How beautiful, gorgeous. Its color pattern is like a coincidence. Between the moment I am only obsessed with staring at this butterfly. I suddenly find myself making a silent prayer to the butterfly. I am far away, uprooted from home and moved to a strange place, all alone. Nothing familiar, not a loved one is nearby but a few folks from the same home town. We work day and night with unfamiliar guests and have trouble with even basic communication. It is difficult to befriend anyone when there's peer competition." -- LiLi, Hong Kong vs. Japan

"I know that the vibrant colours of flowers don't last forever. Sex work is a sunset industry. To survive, I must go some outside. Foreign lands are bigger with more resources." -- Lulu, Hong Kong

"I don't work everyday, mostly working as a substitute. If my child is sick or has any problem, I can still take care of him and give him company. I don't dare letting anyone know that I am here. But I don't steal, I don't rob. I'm only depending on myself." -- Sze Sze, Toronto

"I hope the cops don't come and give me tickets. I hope to have better business. The licensing department discriminates people like us. They find random reasons to punish us. If you don't cooperate, they give you more trouble. We don't dare saying a word, not to mention resisting." -- Connie, Toronto

"If I want dreams to come true, I must make money and save money. To succeed, I need to have a series of support behind me." -- lili, Hong Kong

"Economic difficulty is life. I look for work in a restaurant but they did not want me. They think I wasn't strong enough for lifting. My language skills was not strong enough. No alternative. I just want to make enough money to retire at home. This is the way it is." -- Anonymous

"If it wasn't for us Asian, Europe and North America would not have its economic development. We "neither steal nor rob. So, don't arrest us, don't deport us. We have the same rights as Canadian do." -- Anonymous, Ontario

"Serving the community. There are a lot of single men in Canada. We alleviate their loneliness. I hope that the police would stop targeting us." -- Anonymous, Toronto

Contact Us

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*A Showcase of Artwork Created by Migrant Sex Workers*

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