Strengthening the sex worker movement through capacity-building, advocacy and art:

Reflecting on a community-based research collaboration between PACE Society and the CARE Study

PACE

CARE

SFU SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY









We gratefully acknowledge that our work takes places on the unceded and unsurrendered territories of the xwməθkwəy̓ əm (Musqueam) , Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwətaʔɬ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) nations.

We call on ourselves to listen, learn and act in solidarity with decolonial movements across Turtle Island and beyond.

Presentation Overview

- Who we are, and the origins of our collaboration
- Navigating Sex Work Spaces: COVID-19 and Beyond (2021-2025)
- Shifting support service landscapes and emergent community responses (2026-)



PACE Society

Providing Advocacy, Counseling and Education

- PACE Society is a peer-driven organization located in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver that provides support, advocacy, and education by, with, and for current and former sex workers.

- PACE was started informally in a one bedroom apartment in Vancouver in 1994 by sex workers and their allies, who recognized that some services for sex workers were best delivered by sex workers.





CARE Study

Evolving **C**riminal Legal System **A**pproaches, Emergent Community **R**esponses, Gender Safety and Health (In)**E**quities

- CARE is a community-based research project based at Simon Fraser Univerty (PI Dr. Andrea Krüsi).
- CARE aims to:
  - Characterize how evolving criminal legal systems approaches intersect with gendered and racialized structural vulnerabilities to shape experiences of violence, substance use, and health equity
  - Explore how the impacts of criminalization on health and social wellbeing may be mitigated through community-led interventions (e.g., community safety patrols, sex worker-led violence reporting mechanisms)

CARE Study + PACE

- The CARE Study team includes members of the **AESHA Project** (An Evaluation of Sex Workers' Health Access), based at UBC (PIs Goldenberg & Krüsi)

- AESHA collected data 2010-2024

- PACE Society served as a member of the AESHA Project's Community Advisory Board since 2010



Navigating Sex Work Spaces: COVID-19 and Beyond

An Arts-Based Participatory Research Project to Delineate Pathways beyond Criminalization

PACE

AESHA

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UBC THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Project Goals

- To investigate the experiences of sex workers of all genders and across work environments throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing drug toxicity crisis.
- To increase sex worker visibility, challenge stigma and provide insights into safer sex work environment interventions and increased access to services.
- To produce a lasting collection of art works and stories that document sex workers' experience and contributions to art and activism.

Process

Collaborative Development

Data Collection

- Information and Consent Session
- Creation and Submission of Art Work
- Art Elicitation Interview

Participatory Analysis

Knowledge Mobilization



Artwork by Louise

Our Team

Staff Team

Experiental research assistants and graduate students, PACE staff, and artists- in-residences

Community Advisory Team (CAT)

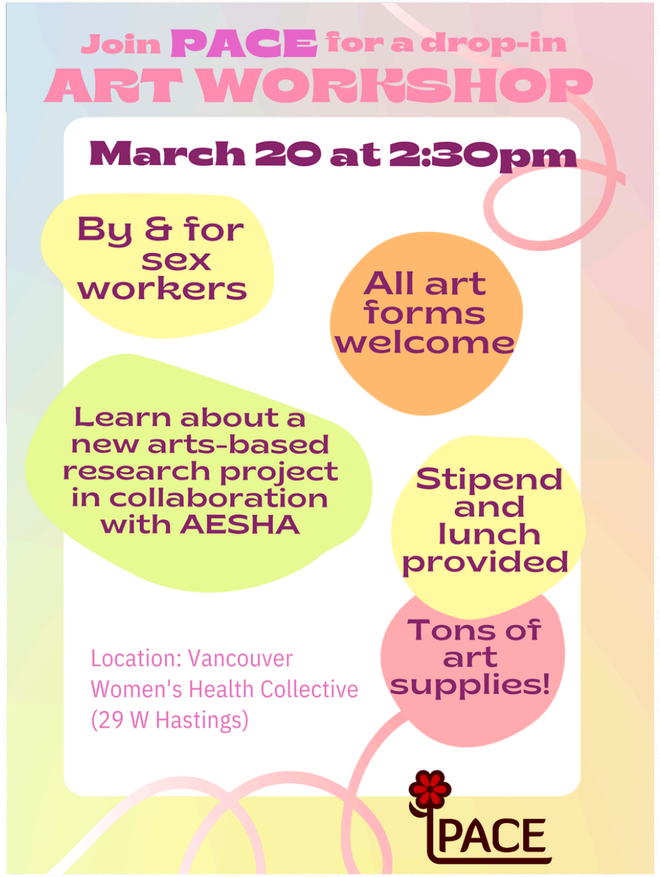
Current and former sex workers, PACE members, community organizers, artists

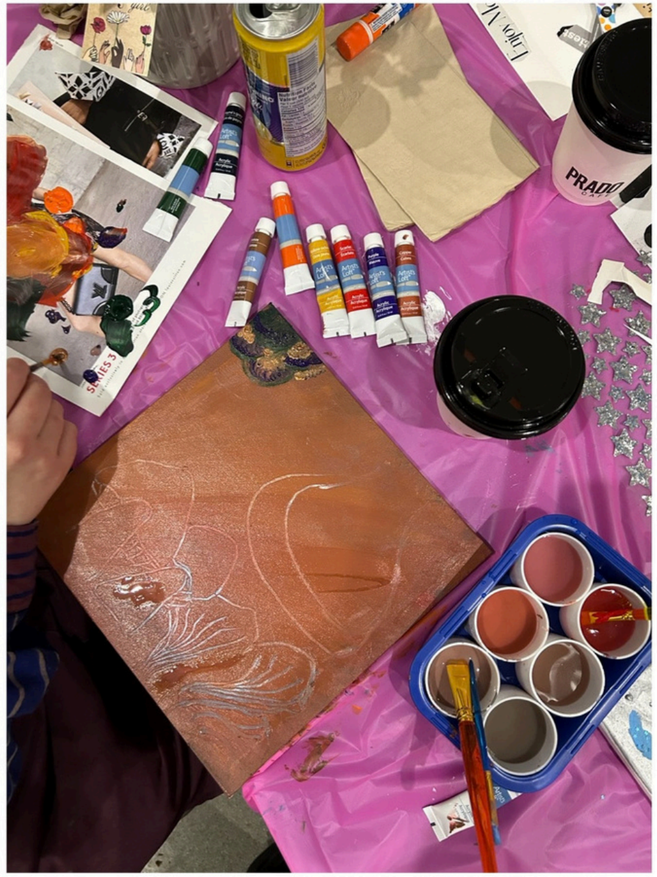
Community Advisory Board

Partner organizations including Kingsway Community Station, PIVOT Legal Society, and the Health Iniative for Men

Reciprocity + transparency

- Meeting immediate needs, including material needs.
- Creating a network of support, such as emotional support.
- Abundant access to equipment, art supplies, and artistic training.
- And at the same time, being open about contraints.





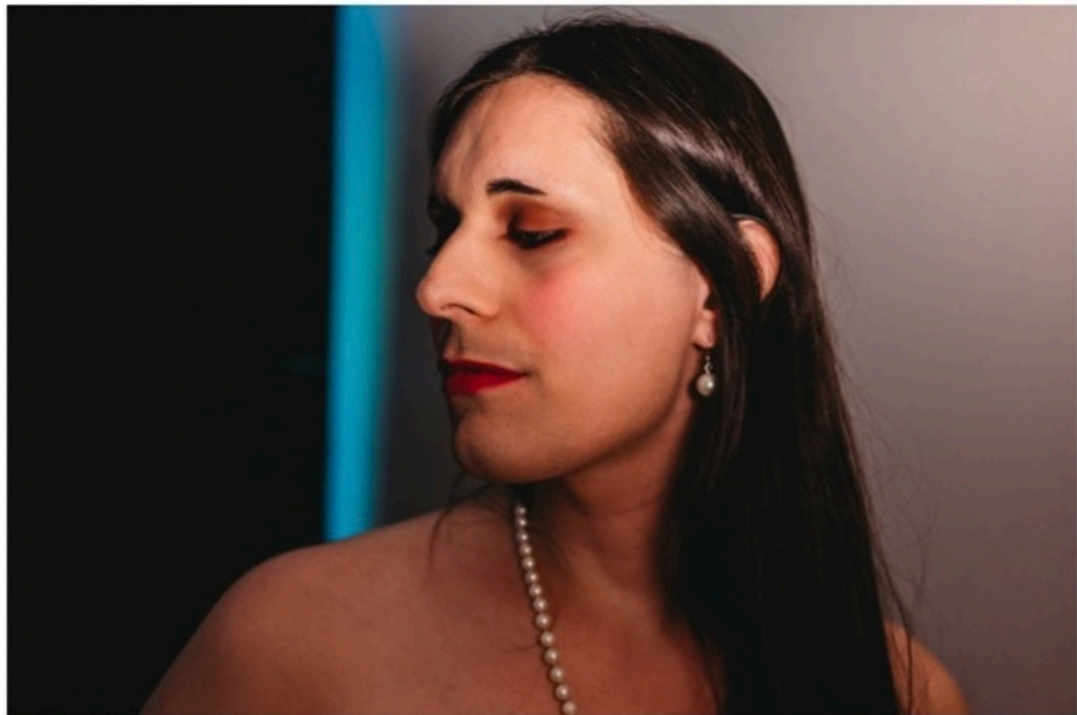




Adapting + pushing back

- Keeping things flexible to allow for greater participant choice, such as open-ended selection of artistic medium
- Adapting to new ideas
- Pusing back against REB conceptions of ‘vulnerability’, to allow for full creative expression





Photos by AlessaSilentDoll

Co-creation as epistemic justice

- CAT members co-developed our approach to participatory analysis
- CAT members and participants took part in creative analysis sessions
- CAT members as co-authors of peer-reviewed journal articles:

Pearson et al. (2026) Our Hustle, Our Struggle, Our Art: Reflections From an Arts-Based Participatory Research Project With Sex Workers in Vancouver, BC. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods.*





Knowledge Mobilization





FREE ENTRY AND POPCORN!

March 2nd @ 2:30 pm

COMMUNITY

FILM SCREENING

for Sex Worker Rights Day

THE CINEMATHEQUE 1131 HOWE ST.

PACE

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vancouver foundation

An art exhibition by sex workers



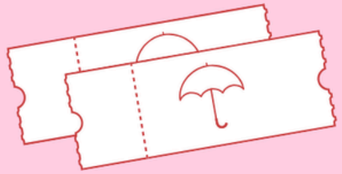
“[The project] grew to become much more, and it arose organically as we progressed and interest was generated in making a film and showing the artwork” - Echo

“There is one side where we’re trying to advocate for sex workers and increase awareness, but also, there is a level of feeling proud or really excited to see some of your work being displayed in a gallery and people can enjoy it.” - Alessa

FREE ENTRY AND POPCORN!

March 2nd @ 2:30 pm

COMMUNITY



FILM SCREENING

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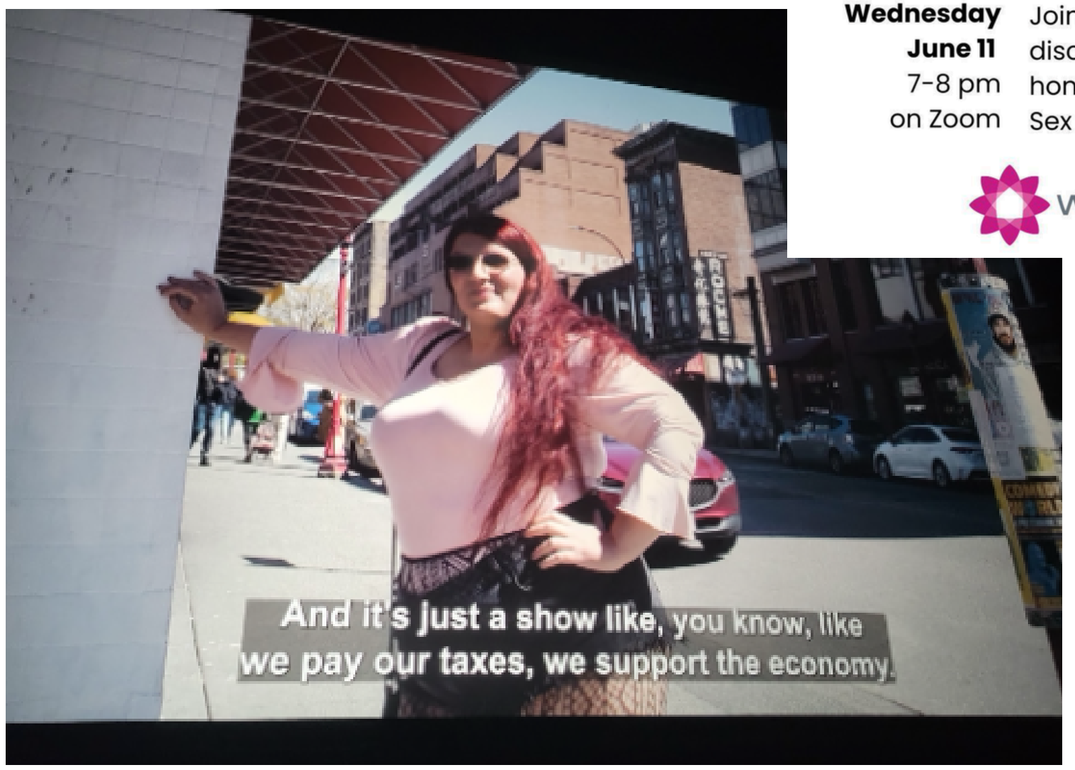
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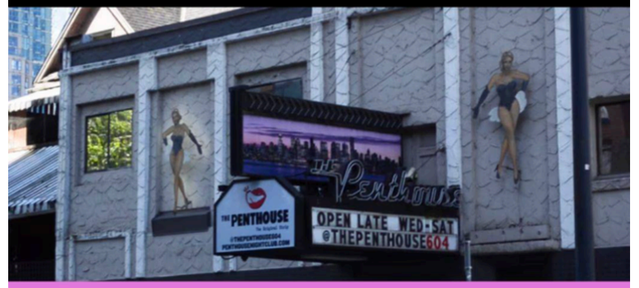
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WISH Drop-In Centre online screening:

ADVENTURES IN SEX WORK



Wednesday
June 11
7-8 pm
on Zoom

Join us to view and discuss this short film in honour of International Sex Workers' Day!

WISH Drop-In Centre Society

Our Hustle, Our Struggle, Our Art

An art exhibit
by and for sex workers

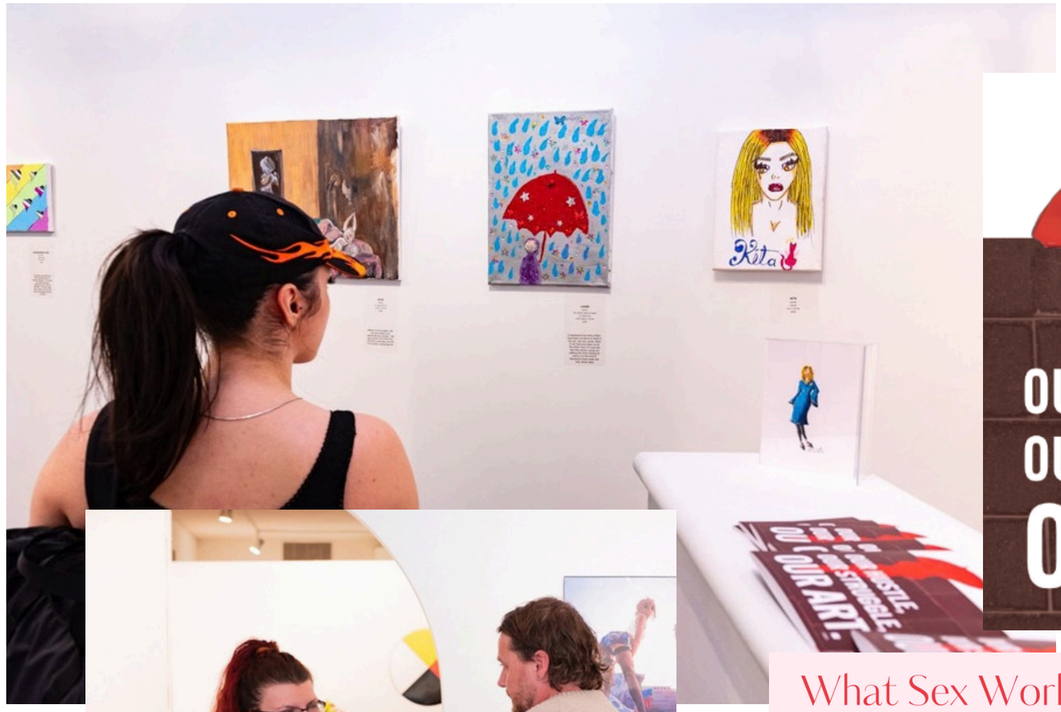
In celebration of International
Sex Workers Day

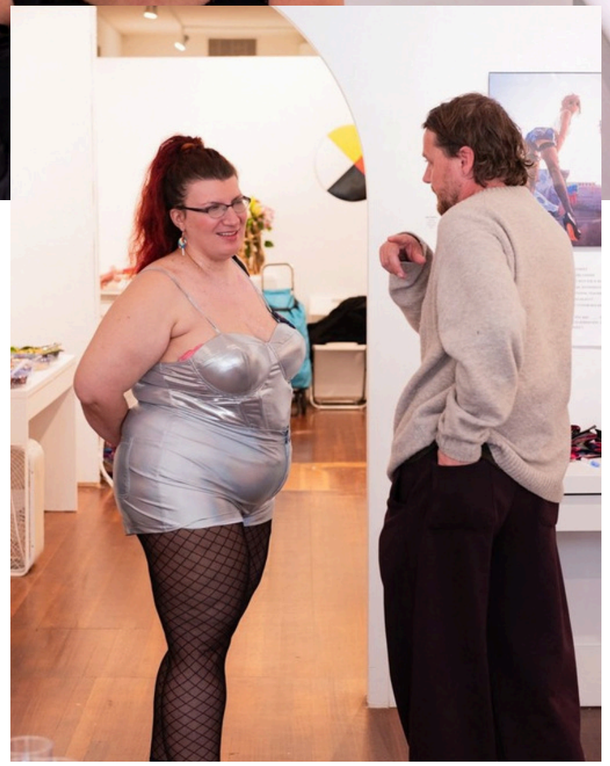


June 2nd-9th, 2025
Gallery George, 140 W Hastings St

Opening reception June 2nd @4pm
OurHustle-OurStruggle.eventbrite.com

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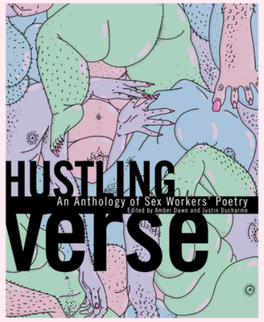


Photos by Carrie Hill



What Sex Workers Can Teach You About *Craft*

A writing workshop based on sex worker poetry, with Amber Dawn



In 2019, editors Justin Ducharme and Amber Dawn launched Hustling Verse: An Anthology of Sex Workers' Poetry, published by Arsenal Pulp Press.

The poems within showcase a wide and nimble breadth of approaches to free verse and form.

Using Hustling Verse as a craft-driven reading sample, this workshop aims to bring energy and variety to your creative practice.

June 6th, 1pm-3:30pm
The Gallery George, 140 W Hastings St

Free event for members of the s*x work community!
To register, please email jennie.pearson@ubc.ca

Shifting support service landscapes and emergent community responses:

Reimagining community care models to support sex workers' occupational health and safety

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Service closures in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside leave sex workers without vital support

Published: April 20, 2025 8.27am EDT

People walking along East Hastings Street in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside neighbourhood in November 2019. THE CANAD

In late February, the PACE Society, a long-standing pillar of support for sex workers in Vancouver, announced it was suspending services and programming and laying off most staff. For more than 30 years, PACE has provided peer support, counselling and basic services using a "by, for and with" sex workers approach.

Now, amid a funding crisis that has led to layoffs of mostly staff with current or former experience of sex work, the future of vital support services for sex workers in Vancouver is uncertain.

'It's devastating': Sex workers say Vancouver is losing vital safety supports before global World Cup spotlight

Concerns have grown after the city cut one of its two sex worker safety planner positions, a role meant to connect sex workers with City Hall and flag safety issues in the community

By **Sarah Grochowski**

Published Apr 29, 2026

Authors



Jennie Pearson





NEWS Health

As Supports Dwindle, Violence Against Sex Workers Is Up

Women are worried that conditions could lead to another serial killer operating in the Lower Mainland. A Tyee deep dive.

British Columbia

2 support centres for sex workers in Vancouver close, one permanently

PACE Society permanently closed. WISH Drop-in Centre cl

Santana Dreaver · CBC News · Posted: Aug 15, 2025 7:09 PM EDT | Last Updated: Au

Vancouver's Last Sex Worker Drop-In Centre May Shutter in Spring

The city is changing how it funds Kingsway Community Station. That's 'dangerous,' its program director says.

Project Goals

- To explore how recent closures and changes in services have impacted Vancouver's sex work community
- To gather community recommendations for future or improved services
- To maintain connection among PACE members and staff
- To build capacity for mutual aid and grassroots support



Red Umbrella March, 2026, Vancouver

Showing up in solidarity







Thank you!

www.pace-society.org
@pacesociety

www.aesha.med.ubc.ca
@car3study

