PACE SOCIETY SEX WORKER RELIEF FUND
A REPORT
DECEMBER 2020
SEX WORKER RELIEF FUND

Getting COVID-19 Relief to Vancouver Sex Workers

- Thanks to the generosity of the Vancouver Foundation, DTES Response, and individual donors, PACE was able to distribute $152,325 to sex workers in need in Metro Vancouver.

- The experiential Relief Fund Committee evaluated over 1300 applications, prioritizing applicants from marginalized communities while awarding payments of $100 or $175 based on applicants’ demonstrated need.

- Many sex workers have been unable or afraid to apply for critical COVID-19 relief such as the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit due to the federal criminalization of and stigma surrounding sex work.

“I had more peace of mind about not worrying about money. It kept that wolf away from the door” – Kozmo, PACE member

“I’m just very grateful for all the help I received during the crisis. Knowing that people care makes a big difference...so thank [you] wishes of happiness and prosperity to the staff and volunteers of PACE.” – Anon

“The PACE fund has helped me to buy groceries as my work was in transition and unsafe to do. Thank you so much. [PACE] was one of the only places that was able to help in a very tangible, safe and accessible way.” – Sekani, PACE member
LESSONS LEARNED
Challenges, Setbacks, & Concerns

- The need for financial relief for sex workers during COVID-19 has been clear and dire since the beginning of the pandemic and inspired our creation of the Se Worker Relief Fund. One of the reasons that this need has been so dire is the exclusion of most sex workers from provincial and federal relief efforts. The criminalization of and stigma against sex work makes it unfeasible for most sex workers to file taxes, which means that they are excluded from most government relief that has required participation in legitimized economies. Our Relief Fund provided an integral low-barrier form of relief from the economic impacts of COVID-19 for sex workers in Vancouver, but it was a bit like trying to ameliorate a flood with tissue paper. In addition to administering the Relief Fund, we have advocated at various levels of government for more accessible relief and the implementation of a Universal Basic Income as well as continuing our efforts to push for the decriminalization of sex work at the federal level. This change would make it easier for sex workers to be valued members of the formal economy and form unions to protect their labour rights. All things considered, however, the Relief Fund was an important stopgap that provided critical relief to sex workers in need of basic life necessities.

- COVID-19 has had incredibly distressing impacts on the health, safety, and wellbeing of sex workers in Vancouver, a group that already faced a great deal of structural and interpersonal barriers before the pandemic. Providing ongoing support to our experiential Relief Fund Committee and responding to their needs during the evaluation process were paramount to assuring community care and sustainability. We adapted the Relief Fund form and evaluation process midway through the project in order to make it easier for the Committee to assess applications and mitigate vicarious trauma.

- Despite the immense success of the Sex Worker Relief Fund and the ongoing generous support provided by funders and individual donors, we consistently faced more requests for financial relief than we were able to provide. These requests continue to come in despite the fact that the project has ended. Our experience with this Relief Fund has evidenced the dire need of sex workers for financial relief during this crisis and the lack of other accessible funds.