



Ending Violence Against Sex Workers

For Immediate Release

COVID 19: 'National Ugly Mugs secures vital funding to support UK sex workers during pandemic'

National Ugly Mugs (NUM), a national organisation which provides greater access to justice and protection for sex workers who are often targeted by dangerous individuals but feel unsafe reporting these incidents to police, has today been awarded just over £300,000 in National Lottery funding towards its Covid-19 Emergency Response project for UK Sex Workers.

Sex workers are an intersectional group that comprises parents, pensioners, students and the working class of diverse backgrounds. They are among those who have been suffering due to losing income overnight back in March when the pandemic first hit. Many struggle with health issues, precarious work, and live in unstable and unsafe housing. Furthermore, as a result of unemployment, there has been a surge in people engaging in online sex work.

The pandemic has resulted in NUM seeing an upsurge in requests for food and emergency resources in addition to victim support ¹. The funding from the National Lottery Community Fund, the largest funder of community activity in the UK, will be used for a full launch of the piloted project: 'Covid-19 Emergency Response for UK Sex Workers.' Utilising a national network of sex workers and practitioners, this response will provide information for community services and other entities that have direct contact with individuals in adult industries; emergency vouchers for the purchase of food and hygiene supplies for thousands of sex workers who are in dire need; and resources and information to adequately respond to mental health, grief & loss, and suicide prevention for this valuable community. This essential facility ensures that sex workers do not have to make important decisions about their health and safety on an empty stomach, and they will have non-judgmental support whether they remain in sex work or chose to transition from it.

NUM was formed in 2012 after 10 years of advocacy from practitioners, police officials and researchers who wanted a centralised strategy for documenting and sharing crimes against sex workers. Since then, NUM has grown to be the nations' first sex worker-centered victim support and crime prevention charity. As of December 2019, [NUM has 7567 total members with 6193 people identifying as sex workers](#); the balance comprises practitioners, community organisations and venues. NUM provide a mechanism for sex workers to report harms they experience while working and distributes these warnings in the form of alerts to sex working communities. These alerts help sex workers avoid dangerous people and situations. In 2019, NUM received almost 1,000 reports of harm to sex workers and since inception, has sent over 1.17 million alerts for crime prevention.

NUM case workers, who include qualified Independent Sexual Violence Advisors and other experts provide crisis intervention and in-depth support to sex workers who are seeking justice and healing through and beyond police and courts.

¹ We know this based on calls to the casework team from workers seeking direction on how to get food and get support from food banks. The £75/wk on UC for those who managed to get on it is inadequate. Here's a news story or two we could link to <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/covid19/2020/06/08/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-sex-workers/>

<https://www.wired.co.uk/article/sex-workers-coronavirus>

National Ugly Mugs

209 Green Fish Resource Centre, 46-50 Oldham Street, Manchester, M4 1LE
website: www.uglymugs.org | e-mail: admin@uglymugs.org | tel: 0161 629 9861

Charity No: 1122461 | Company No: 5734365

In April NUM surveyed sex workers about their needs during the pandemic that was written about in an article in the [British Journal of Medicine in May 2020](#). They listed needing money for food, accommodations, along with needing advice on health and wellbeing, finance, support with isolation and safety. One respondent remarked: '*I only need money right now. Everything else I can sort out.*'

Dr. Raven Bowen, CEO of National Ugly Mugs said:

'We are very happy to serve a community that The National Lottery Community Fund finds worthy of investment. Sex workers have been left behind when government pandemic support was given out to other workers and marginalised populations. We called for government and adult services websites to 'Stand and Be Counted' among those who supported sex workers during the pandemic and during their darkest hours. We wrote to MPs, including members of the cabinet and shadow cabinet, begging for resources to help this community, to no avail. We wrote grants appealing for support and received investment from Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and London Funders, Comic Relief and others, that supported case work and the soft launch of our voucher program allowing us to provide food to 336 people who were starving and continued sex working during lockdown. The National Lottery Community Fund has now responded in a big way and we expect to make an immediate positive impact in the lives of sex workers around the country. We will continue to call upon government to work with us to roll out a longer-term solution for sex workers as we go into what we know will be a difficult Autumn.'

Sex workers on staff at NUM will be supported in launching and continuing several initiatives to their constituencies.

The Research & Development (R&D) Team of sex industry experts had this to say:

'As the Research & Development (R&D) team, we try to make sure that NUM is standing in direct contact with the wider sex working community and actually serves sex workers. Especially during this pandemic, being informed and having a say about the work of an influential and well-established charity like NUM is essential for the safety and wellbeing of many sex workers. While immediate financial support in the form of food vouchers has been a crucial part of mitigating the direct and sudden loss of income, the funds of the lottery grant will also help the R&D team to facilitate community education in order to support sex workers in the long-term and to promote² a dialogue between various sex worker-led groups and NUM, so that the actual needs of the community can be addressed in ways that would otherwise not be possible...This includes but is not limited to trans sex workers, sex workers of colour, those working on the street, and migrant sex workers, particularly those without papers.'

Contact: Dr. Raven Bowen, CEO 0161 629 9861 or email admin@uglymugs.org
Sian Prime, Chair 0776 660 0655 or email sian@uglymugs.org

ENDS

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