



Session 19 | Why Engaging with the Sex Worker Community is Important

August 24, 2020

3:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m. EDT

Street-based sex workers, or people who receive money or goods in exchange for sexual services, are often subjected to shocking violence by both the public and the police. Street-based sex workers have reported many police encounters of sexual harassment and sexual assault to research institutions such as the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health and Amnesty International. However, many sex workers are understandably afraid to report their abuse to local law enforcement and civilian oversight agencies because it is too often dismissed as the “cost of doing business.” This ripple effect disproportionately affects the LGBTQ+ community. Its members are more likely to engage in street-based sex work for survival, due to discrimination in employment and housing caused by a lack of understanding and acceptance of queer sexual orientations and gender identities.

When sex-workers are blamed for their own victimization, the true aggressors continue to be unreported, unchecked, and shielded by the convenient shadow of stigma. There is an opportunity for law enforcement oversight stakeholders to protect sex worker rights to be treated with value, dignity, and respect and to be protected by law enforcement and civilian oversight agencies.

Utilizing the perspectives of public health and social justice advocates, this panel will allow civilian oversight stakeholders to understand the issues related to the sex worker community and their encounters with law enforcement. Participants will gain the basic cultural competency necessary to begin communicating with transgender people. Panelists will showcase effective outreach initiatives that have been implemented to create sex worker community engagement. We will discuss what in-house practices oversight agencies can employ to make sex worker complainants feel more comfortable and safer during the investigative process. Finally, we will review what legislation and departmental policies advocates, activists, and analysts may consider to bolster law enforcement accountability and public safety for this marginalized and vulnerable community.

Speakers:

- Tara Anderson, Director of Policy, San Francisco District Attorney's Office, San Francisco, CA
- Nicole L. Brown, Sergeant, Metropolitan Police Department, Washington, DC
- Alexandra Lutnik, Ph.D., Adjunct Faculty, University of California-Berkeley, Berkeley, CA
- RJ Thompson, Managing Director, Urban Justice Center's Sex Workers Project, New York, NY

Moderator:

- Samantha Jeffrey, Investigator, Office of Police Complaints, Washington, DC

Speaker Biographies

Tara Anderson | Tara has over 18 years of experience working within and closely with local and state governments to provide services and improve outcomes for individuals and families impacted by criminal justice systems. Tara is Director of Policy and Innovation at the Office of San Francisco District Attorney Chesa Boudin. Tara serves in a leadership role advancing policy on behalf of the office specializing in sentencing, pre-trial diversion, alternatives to traditional prosecution, victim services, and



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legislative reforms. In addition, she manages a portfolio of 25 federal, state and local grants. Tara transitioned to the District Attorney's Office after serving as the Senior Planner and Policy Analyst for the Violence Prevention and Intervention Unit at San Francisco's Department of Children Youth and Their Families. Tara previously served as the Children and Family Programs Manager for Centerforce, a NGO/CBO working with those incarcerated in state local and federal facilities, their families and people recently released from jails and prisons in Northern and Central California. Tara received her B.S. in Criminal Justice and minor in International Politics at Northeastern University and her M.P.P. at the Goldman School of Public Policy, UC Berkeley. Lastly, in her volunteer time Tara serves as an Oakland Police Commissioner.

Nicole L. Brown | Sergeant Nicole Brown has been serving the Metropolitan Police Department, in Washington D.C, (MPDC) for over a decade. She is currently assigned to the Metropolitan Police Department's Special Liaison Branch. This branch is under the Executive Office of the Chief of Police, where she supervises the department's Special Liaison Units (SLU). Under Sergeant Brown's supervision are the department's four liaison units (Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgender, Latino, Asian and Deaf and Hard of Hearing). Until October 2018, she was assigned to MPDC's Patrol Services Bureau, in the city's Fifth District, where she supervised the evening shift for 2 and a half years. (80-125 officers). Prior to being promoted, she served as a foot-beat Officer in the city's Third District.

Nicole received her B.A. (Political Science) from the University of Maryland Baltimore County (2004-2008). She also pursued her Masters at the University of Maryland, studying Cybersecurity. She is a native of Prince George's County Maryland and currently resides in Anne Arundel County with her wife.

Sam Jeffrey | Sam Jeffrey (she/her/hers) joined Washington, D.C.'s Office of Police Complaints (OPC) as a complaint investigator in November 2018. Prior to joining OPC, she started her career in public service at the Baltimore City Office of Civil Rights and Wage Enforcement, where she worked on efforts involving police oversight, criminal expungement, and wage theft. In her spare time, Sam volunteers for the mobile outreach program at HIPS, a community-based public health agency committed to reducing harm of individuals engaged with the District's street economy. Sam received her B.A. in Political Science from Howard University.

Alexandra Lutnik, Ph.D. | Alexandra Lutnick, Ph.D. is a social scientist whose work focuses on people engaged in sex work, people experiencing trafficking, as well as assisting agencies with program evaluation. Dr. Lutnik's work is grounded in harm reduction and strives to always engage community members in the process of knowledge production. She provides consultation services to non-profit, government, and research organizations, is a lecturer in the School of Social Welfare at the University of California, Berkeley, and is a somatic yoga therapist. Her book, "Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: Beyond Victims and Villains" was published in 2016 by Columbia University Press.

RJ Thompson | RJ Thompson, Esq. is a longtime human rights lawyer, organizer, and educator; as well as a certified personal trainer, go-go dancer and performer in the adult film industry. Prior to joining the Sex Workers Project as Managing Director, RJ worked as the Fair Courts Project Community Educator at Lambda Legal, where he trained judges, attorneys and court staff on gender and sexuality cultural competency and advocated for judicial diversity and judicial independence in Arizona, Texas, Florida and the Federal bench. Previously, RJ served as Director of the Human Rights Program at the Woodhull Sexual Freedom Alliance where he advocated for the human rights of sex workers during the first United Nations (UN) Universal Periodic Review of the U.S. RJ was also the National Campaign & Advocacy



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Manager at the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender (LGBT) Community Center in New York City, where he coordinated Causes in Common, a national cross-movement initiative linking the reproductive justice and LGBT movements. He was Membership Program Coordinator at the US Human Rights Network (USHRN) Coordinating Center, where he organized Southern NGOs to meet with the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants. In addition to his staff role with USHRN, he also co-founded the Sexual Rights and Gender Justice Working Group of the USHRN as a volunteer leader and later served on the USHRN Board of Directors. RJ received his J.D. from the City University of New York (CUNY) School of Law and his B.A. from the University of South Florida in Tampa.



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