

Don't Panic! Plan!

If an arrest occurs in our community how will we respond? Often when a support sex worker gets arrested, s/he loses contact with his/her friends and support network. This is often because of the misguided notion that if one person is in trouble, his/her friends are also at risk. This is simply not true when dealing with state-level misdemeanors.

An arrest is an opportunity for us to unify and take action against the system that oppresses us. We can strengthen our community by demonstrating support for our colleague in need, we can get our messaging out into the media and we can prevent further intrusions by observing the legal process directly as it relates to sex workers.

We are a mixed group of people. Some are extremely private and concerned about confidentiality. Others choose to take extra precautions, but also are willing to speak publicly either as a sex worker or as an advocate for the rights of sex workers. In the event of an arrest within our community, having an emergency response plan in place will make it possible for people in all areas of the privacy continuum to actively participate in a pro-active approach to dealing with risk.

I'm going to make a brief outline of how this system can work and I'm curious to see what direction others may like to take it in. Please respond back with any questions/concerns you have so that we can modify and develop this into a realistic peer support project.

Phase 1: Individual Emergency Plan

If an individual in our community gets arrested, there will be some essential immediate tasks that they will need somebody to deal with. I'm going to try to summarize an example of how an Emergency Response (ER) can deal with these issues...

Kandie has one daughter named Rachel, a parakeet and a Golden Retriever. Her partner, Steve, lives in another town about 30 mins away. She lives in an apartment in the Sunset and works nearby in a separate location. On Tuesdays, her daughter gets out of school at 3pm and has soccer practice from 4pm-5:30pm. The dog stays in the house all day and she lets him out to relieve himself once every two hours. The parakeet is fine in his cage for a day or two as long as his food and water are full.

On a Tuesday afternoon Kandie has a meeting with a new client at 10 am, then she plans to take her dog for a walk, stop by the post office to post bills, take a steak out of the freezer to thaw for dinner, and head over to the school to pick up Rachel, prepare her a snack and take her to soccer practice.

Unfortunately, the 10am appt turned out to be a sting, despite the fact that Kandie got a reference. Kandie is arrested and her in-call location gets destroyed while the police dig around for evidence. Fortunately, Kandie didn't keep her computer, cell phone or other records in her space. By 12 noon, Kandie is in the back of a cop car being transported to 850 Bryant. After being processed, Kandie is permitted to make one call. She calls the number that she has memorized, it is the home phone number of her trusted friend Angela. Angela answers and Kandie only has to say that she's been picked up and Angela knows exactly what steps to take because they worked out their emergency response plan in advance.

Angela looks at her ER schedule and sees that Rachel is out of school at 3pm and has soccer from 4-5:30pm. Angela has enough time to pick Rachel up from school, get her a snack, grab the out-going mail and walk with the dog to the park where Rachel's practice is held. However, she's working the 6-11pm shift at the Lusty Lady and can't afford to take the night off. She calls Steve to let him know what's happening. He says he can leave work early and meet them at the park by 5pm so that Angela can get to work on time. He has an early meeting the next morning, so Angela will need to come back after her shift and spend the night so that she can get Rachel off to school in the morning.

During this time, Angela and Steve have told Rachel whatever story Kandie prepared in advance (maybe out of town for work, dealing with family emergency, maybe the truth, etc) They worked as a team to ensure that Rachel's day was not seriously disrupted in order to minimize the

stress and confusion that Rachel may be experiencing with her mother's abrupt absence. Since Kandie knew her rights, she told the arresting officers and all of the officers at the jail that she would like to remain silent and would like to see her lawyer. The officers don't like people who invoke their rights and they decide to fuck with her. So they keep her in overnight. Luckily, Angela had the phone number to Kandie's lawyer and called her immediately after speaking to Kandie. Kandie's lawyer meets with her in jail and gets her out asap.

While Kandie was in jail, she knew that her child and pets were being well cared for by her loved ones. Since she didn't have to worry about Rachel and the pets, she was able to focus on her situation. She requested a piece of paper and pencil, which she's entitled to by state law and she writes down every detail she can remember of the entire arrest- including the badge number of the officer who called her a skank and said "Women like you are trash." Her very detailed notes will be useful to her lawyer during phase 2 of the ER plan.

When Kandie gets out she has just enough time to go home and shower and then pick Rachel up at school on Wednesday. Rachel is happy to see her and Kandie chooses how much of the story, if any, she's going to tell her. Kandie has a court date in a couple days and has to choose whether to plea guilty to disturbing the peace or to fight the charges and demand her jury of peers.

Phase 2: Court Support/Teamwork

Kandie knows that the charges are bogus and that the SFPD will have a very difficult time finding a jury in SF that will actually find her guilty. She's not ashamed of what she does for a living and has told her loved ones what she does, so she's not afraid to fight the charges. Despite feeling confident, Kandie knows that this will be a difficult and humiliating process, so she activates the Emergency Response Network for support.

Once Kandie knew her court date and details, she called the first number on her ER phone tree. She gave all of the details to that person, who then called the next person on the list, and so on and so on. The members of the ER team who have time will sit in court with her when she enters her plea. They will also be available to help get Rachel to/from school if court dates conflict with her schedule. While this form of support will not necessarily change the outcome of Kandie's sentencing, she will feel stronger and less humiliated when her peers are present to provide moral support.

Kandie's lawyer will determine whether or not direct action is useful in this case. Direct action would include things such as writing letters to the editor to express outrage at Kandie's arrest, asking people in the community to write letters to Kandie's judge that express why she's a good person and model citizen to demonstrate the absurdity of trying her, etc. Each different case will need to have a different direct action plan based on the circumstances of the case, the preferences of the defendant, and the recommendations of the lawyer.

-Individual Plan

*Be strong!

*Take legal training's, know your rights and BE PREPARED!

*Identify your emergency point people

*Create list of priorities for what needs to be cared for in your absence

*Create schedule of children's activities, pet feeding, plant watering, etc.

*Memorize emergency point people's phone numbers

*Know who your lawyer will be or make preparations for dealing with a public defender

*Have plan for what you will tell your kids/parents/lovers/etc in the event of an arrest

*Put aside money to live on while potentially being unable to work

-Court Support

*Make contact with other sex workers in your region

*Participate and Develop ER phone tree/email lists, then distribute phone tree to all participants

*Develop court support plans

*Follow through with ER plan (make phone calls, attend court hearing, attend meetings, etc.)