Sex workers are amongst the most vulnerable and marginalised in Singapore. They are criminalised by the judiciary, humiliated by the media, and discriminated against by society. Violence and exploitation within the formal and informal segments of the sex industry remains commonplace, and victims rarely have a voice or an avenue to seek redress.

Project X was established in 2008 in order to address this. We are a non-profit organisation that aims to advance the rights and representation of sex workers in Singapore. We provide legal aid to sex workers, educate them about sexual health issues, bridge the communication gap between sex workers and the public, and offer a platform for sex workers to build their personal capacities as leaders and changemakers.

Ultimately, Project X aims to support sex workers in navigating their work and lives with greater empowerment.

From Left: Vanessa, Wany, Sherry and Prashain (Photo by Darren Ong)
Meet the board!

**President**

Alicia Altorfer-Ong

Alicia is a historical researcher and corporate trainer. She has extensive professional and personal experience in volunteer management, locally and overseas. Alicia strongly believes that every voice in society deserves to be heard.

**Vice President**

Pavarne Shantti

Pavarne is passionate about human rights and environmental sustainability. They have been volunteering with Project X since 2015 and was the Volunteer Coordinator till 2018. They have a background in Zoology and currently work as a research assistant at the Tropical Marine Science Institute.

**Secretary**

Raksha Kirpal Mahtani

Raksha is an educator and researcher working on issues around violence, health, and discrimination faced by queer and trans folks. She is also a sometimes poet and proud mother of cat.

**Treasurer**

Shashitharan Ambalakan

Shashi is a professional accountant with an inclination for social remediation and advocacy. He has several years’ experience in managing the finances of non-profit organisations, and believes in proper governance amongst non-profit organisations.

**Board Member**

Lisa Ja'afar

Lisa has an undying passion for the world of activism. She first joined Project X as a sex workers’ peer educator and as the Associate Project Coordinator. She advocates for the fundamental liberties of sex workers to enjoy a safe work environment, legal protection and inalienable human rights.

**Board Member**

Tan En

Tan En is a dedicated activist for marginalised populations. He has served in a number of influential capacities in the non-profit sector, most notably as a Director of Advocacy at ACRES. He co-founded AdvocAid, a non-profit organisation that advocates for those in need through crowdfunding in a respectful and dignified way. He currently runs Ray of Hope.

**Board Member**

Lee Yi Ting

Yi Ting has worked as an educator for the past five years, and believes in the potential of education to develop social consciousness and empathy. Her background is in linguistics and literature, with a focus on gender and sexuality studies. Before joining the board, Yi Ting was a volunteer with Project X, and helped with outreach, events and research.

**Board Member**

Teh Tze Keong, Alan

Alan is a Business Development Manager of a mobile app startup. He was a financial consulting manager from 2005 to 2017. He is a fluent speaker and has held many trainings and seminars for both his clients and new recruits in the financial service industry.
Message from the Board

What kind of Singapore do we want to live in? If we aspire to a society of greater empathy, compassion and fairness, then we must dig deep into our heart of hearts to try to understand those who are marginalised and voiceless. 2018 was a busy year for Project X, yet there is even more that needs to be done.

Despite ongoing challenges throughout the year, including an increase in crimes targeting sex workers and general social and structural prejudice, the Project X team persevered with its outreach programmes. Our trained staff and dedicated volunteers have fostered rapport and closer engagement with the community. We see the importance of these ties most acutely in times of crisis: sex workers are more likely to report incidents of abuse to a trusted ally. Sex workers are also more likely to seek assistance from that trusted ally for issues relating to sexual health, emotional well-being, counselling support, retirement planning, and so forth. Project X is here for them.

Our newly-installed Board works closely with Vanessa to ensure that Project X’s programmes continue to be fully aligned with its mission. We are committed to using our diverse personal and professional networks to raise funds and to create more collaborative opportunities. If you are in position to make a contribution in whatever shape or form, please come to our office for a cup of tea - we would love to have a chat.

In the past twelve months, the support and encouragement we have received has been heartening. Most of all, your contributions have enabled us to access, empower and elevate those we serve. On behalf of the Project X Board and Management Team, I would like to thank the foundations, institutional donors and individual sponsors who believe in the value of what we do.

To the community of sex workers: together we will make our society a kinder and fairer one.

A luta continua,

Dr. Alicia Altorfer-Ong

President of the Board, Project X (Sunshine Initiative)
Executive Director’s Foreword

Even a cursory reading of these comments highlights to us that many people still do not see people in the sex industry as equal human beings: selling sex is wrong and shameful but buying sex is not; sex workers do not deserve basic human decency and ought to be humiliated; sex workers have no right to privacy and should be paraded around during arrests. Yet, people expect sex workers to exist. Comments that it’s the “oldest profession” (not sure how one establishes that) and that it is a “necessary evil” continue to permeate society.

The State continues to secretly regulate the sex industry through the Medical Surveillance Scheme (colloquially known as the “yellow card” scheme), even as they release press statements saying that they will “spare no effort in clamping down and take tough enforcement action on vice activities” (sic). Sex workers remain pawns in the grand scheme of trying to brand and shape Singapore as a “conservative” society. They are invisibilised and forced behind closed doors when necessary, and humiliated in the media when it befits the purpose of the State. They are patronised by men who believe they have a right to purchase sex, but who turn around and deny sex workers their humanity. They are robbed by others who believe they are entitled to free sex, and scammed by those who prey on their vulnerabilities.

Project X exists because we believe that the tears, cries, and screams for help from sex workers should not be ignored. While the crimes against sex workers and the degrading treatment they face are not unique to the demographic, many people deliberately abuse sex workers because they know that they can get away with it. The stigma and prejudices against sex workers in Singapore engender such violence, and permits abusers to walk away with impunity. In a rare conviction against an abuser who tried to assault and rob sex workers, “Deputy Public Prosecutor Sruthi Boppana told the court that the trio had specifically targeted foreign prostitutes, believing they would be less likely to report the matter to the police”.

After ten years in existence, we remain the only rights-based organisation dedicated to serving and supporting the sex worker community in Singapore. We remain the only organisation that seeks to amplify the voices of sex workers - highlighting the ways that they have had their basic human rights violated, and assisting them in accessing justice.

As an organisation that serves a minority community (with a ‘guestimated’ population size of about 10,000), we don’t command the same level of political influence that many other causes do. As such, we rely heavily on the support and solidarity from other movements and organisations. We are grateful that many people have stepped forward to lend their support to us throughout the years.

Project X exists because we believe that the cisgender women, cisgender men, and transgender women that we’ve met in the sex industry deserve to be heard, and deserve to have a say regarding laws and policies that affect them.

A special mention is extended to two of our biggest monetary donors this year: the Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE) and LUSH. We are also grateful to our newly minted board members, who have responded to our calls for help to professionalise the organization, and enabled us to serve the community better.

We are thankful for the opportunity to be featured in three books this year: ‘The Art of Advocacy’ by Constance Singam and Margaret Thomas; Simon Vincent’s ‘The Naysayers’ Book Club’; and the Birthday Book, and be invited to be a part of talks (p. 25), conferences (p. 35), and capacity building workshops (p. 36).

2018 marked my 7th year with the organization, Wany’s (Associate Director for Outreach) 5th year, and Sherry’s (Researcher and Writer) 4th year. Our volunteer pool has grown and you can read more about their contributions on page 40. I’m eternally grateful that they have decided to join us in the oft challenging journey to ensuring equity in society, and to continuing to be the leading voice for sex workers in Singapore. The road ahead is long and arduous, but we hope that you will one day join us.

In Solidarity,

Vanessa Ho
Executive Director
2018 In Summary

Jan
- Concluded Human Rights Defender Program
- Financial Literacy Workshop by Moolah

Mar
- International Women’s Day - The Royal Queens’ Tea Party
- Art of Advocacy Talk

May
- Drug Free Campaign with Oogachaga

Jul
- Queer Zine Fest
- Talk at Facebook
- Pink Dot

Aug
- Launch of Naysayer’s Book Club
- Iftar Gathering
- Talks for National Blueprint to end HIV in Singapore
- Interview with YP.sg

Sep
- College of Alice and Peter Tan Student Symposium - Human Library
- Began providing telemedical services at our centre
- Official formation of our board

Oct
- ASEAN’s Civil Society Forum
- Asia Pacific HIV Practitioners’ course
- Began photovoice workshops with our volunteer social justice photographer

Nov
- American Express Leadership Academy
- Singapore AIDS Conference
KEY FIGURES

17,000 Website Hits
82,000 Condoms
109 Cases
50 Abuser Alerts

1349.5 Volunteer Hours
19 Yoga Sessions
31 Public Talks
4 Large-Scale Community Events
Outreach is our core activity. We conduct outreach to five different locations in Singapore, with two community centres serving as the anchor points. Outreach is our opportunity to meet with sex workers, distribute safer sex resources, and introduce our services to them.

Our biggest challenge remains gaining the trust of the sex workers and gatekeepers (e.g. bosses, pimps, bar owners, etc.) as they often assume that we are affiliated with law enforcement officers or that we are troublemakers out to harass them.

Thus, whenever there are new faces, it takes a few weeks of continuous outreach sessions for staff and volunteers to build the rapport required to assist them in a significant way.
During outreach sessions, we are also able to educate sex workers on the ‘Do’s and ‘Don’t’s’ of practicing safe sex, and ensure that they make their sexual health a priority. We take this as an opportunity to tell them we offer free and anonymous STI and HIV testing. Emphasising anonymity is vital as most sex workers are often riddled with fear about a potential travel ban if their HIV positive status is known to the authorities.

Besides verbally explaining this to them, we have curated brochures in different languages. Not only does this make communication easier, it also shows sex workers who don’t speak English that we care about their needs.

In 2018, the most common concerns that were raised by sex workers were about what steps to take if they face abusive clients, and where they can seek treatment for various health conditions.

We believe that our physical outreach services provide our volunteers the opportunity to become active members of the community. We also firmly believe that it is only through real exposure that our volunteers can fully understand why we fight for the rights of sex workers as hard as we do.

As a collective, we aim to destigmatise sex work and the industry in general. By getting people involved in our outreach sessions, we enable our volunteers to acquire knowledge that we hope they share with others in their networks, thus increasing understanding of this largely marginalised group. This builds further dialogue surrounding sex workers, the needs of the community, and the gaps that are in dire need of being addressed.

Sex workers are often very aware of the stigma that exists against them, and often feel that they cannot ask for support or help from anyone. Hence, we use our physical outreach sessions to let sex workers know that they are not alone in whatever plight they might be facing. Their problems range from financial instability to abuse from clients.

During outreach sessions, 82,000 condoms were given out.
Over the past few years, there has been an increased number of raids occurring in Singapore’s prominent red-light districts. For example, in the 23-day islandwide anti-vice operation held in August 2018, 162 individuals were apprehended for their suspected involvement in vice activities. In light of this, there has been a major shift in the sex industry: sex workers have moved from traditional brothel settings to entertainment establishments and residential units, and also taken to online platforms to advertise their services.

Sex workers who adopt the online route face greater health risks than registered brothel-based sex workers. We find that those who advertise online have lower levels of consistent condom use and are less likely to get regular STI or HIV screenings, but also see a higher number of clients than brothel-based sex workers.

We rely heavily on volunteers for online outreach. This entails scouring the internet for advertisements by sex workers, and messaging them via our company phone and introducing our organisation and services. Other times, we post advertisements on such sites to reach out to more sex workers. In 2018, volunteers with various language skills spent a total of over 238 hours on online outreach, and sent out a total of 2243 messages.

We recognise the need to keep up with changes in the sex industry, and have thus adopted a more holistic and pragmatic approach through online outreach.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>No. of Messages Sent</th>
<th>Positive Response Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cis-Female</td>
<td>1362</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trans-Female</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cis-Male</td>
<td>591</td>
<td>45.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Male sex workers were the most responsive, probably due to the fact that many established male sex worker outreach programs exist within the region. As such, they are more willing to believe that we are genuinely here for them. Similarly, transgender female sex workers may also be more familiar with such outreach programs.

Dion, our highly successful male outreach volunteer realised in communicating with male sex workers that their concerns revolve around their preparedness for drug or police raids, as chemsex remains commonplace within the community. Other concerns include clients who come up with excuses to avoid paying them after service.

For transgender sex workers, we received a high number of reports of abuse. These ranged from people impersonating police officers to scam them of money or sex, to clients who verbally and physically abuse them. We try our best to warn other workers of known abusers, and encourage them to report their cases to the police. Unfortunately, many are afraid of repercussions if the police get involved. So, the peer support and sexual health services we provide are more useful for them.

Cisgender women often have agents running their advertisements and acting as gatekeepers. As such, it is hard to establish direct contact with them. In spite of that, some cisgender women have responded to us with queries about their safety and rights.
109 Cases & Abuser Alerts

Project X’s core mission is to render social, legal, and emotional support to sex workers in Singapore. Due to the disenfranchisement that sex workers face, many are wary of accessing mainstream services for fear of judgment or of repercussions. Our data shows that there were 26 out of 33 reportable cases where the sex worker chose not to report the crimes committed against them. Workers cited fear of arrest, deportation, and further threats from agents as the key reasons for not doing so. Cases that were reported did not always see justice. In one case, a client stole $1000 from a sex worker while she was in the bathroom. When the police arrived, they showed skepticism toward the story, refusing to believe that the sex worker had the money. In another case where a sex worker was robbed, the police told the victim that she was a bad person for doing sex work, even though she was doing it to support her parents, who are both retirees.

We continue to classify raids, entrapment, and verbal abuse as unfair and discriminatory police practices. Raids are extremely violent and the central tenet of a raid is the use of psychological dominance: instilling fear in order to ensure the subservience and compliance of the “suspects”. Raid survivors speak of the trauma of raids, and Project X conducts support groups for sex workers who have survived raids. Similarly, entrapment is a common enforcement tactic where police officers pretend to be clients and arrest sex workers upon their agreement to provide sexual services. It is an experience that sex workers often describe as leaving a deep sense of injustice and unfairness; disempowerment and isolation.

Although we are grateful for the increasing number of referrals to us from other sex workers, we constantly worry about the cases that are left unattended. Unlike many other causes, rarely do sex workers take to the internet to search for help, believing that there are no people or organisations out there that want to help them.
Customers remain the top abusers of sex workers [49%], with harassment, physical assault, and financial violence being the top three issues sex workers come to us for. (We define financial violence as non-payment for services, theft, and the use of counterfeit money.) Many abusers believe that sex workers are easy prey, which is unfortunately true, due to the laws and societal stigma that create vulnerabilities. The reason many sex workers join the industry is so that they can earn a decent living, and therefore, any kind of financial violence is an assault on their dignity and rights. Our harassment cases often involve people who do not respect the privacy of sex workers. Many had clients who did not know how to take “no” for an answer, and who resorted to stalking, secretly photographing, and wrongly reporting sex workers to the police for crimes they did not commit. Many of these abusers seem to feel that they have a right to sex workers’ bodies, and therefore reject any notion that sex workers have agency and rights.

Cases included under the “others” category in the ‘Types of Cases’ table include abuses like clients refusing to use condoms. The category also includes clients of sex workers asking for advice on how to help sex workers. This year, we started to see more sex workers coming forward to report their experiences of exploitative practices from their agents.
The underreporting of cases results in abusers getting away with their crimes. To ensure that perpetrators face consequences for their violent and discriminatory actions against sex workers, we started our case management system in 2015, and to date, have assisted over 350 sex workers. When sex workers come to Project X for assistance, we explore several possible avenues of recourse with them.

**Services Rendered:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Counselling</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter writing</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Advice</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Befriender service</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referred to Services</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Project X’s staff is trained in basic counselling skills, and volunteer translators are roped in when necessary. Our skilled volunteers and translators provide critical support to our work. (Read more in our Volunteers section). It cannot be understated how important it is for us to expand the number of partners and individuals we work with, as this ensures that our sex workers are receiving the best support possible.

We continually reach out to different organizations to share with them the issues faced by sex workers, and how best to support sex workers in need. Some of our new partners of 2018 include Eden Law, We Care, IMH, and iDoc.sg. Our existing partners include AWARE, HOME, Invictus Law, Dr Tan and Partners, KMS Counselling, Oogachaga, Action for AIDS, and the Department of STI Control. We would like to thank our partners for their support. We hope that together we will be able to make effective and positive changes for the sex worker community.

This year, we merged our casework data with our abuser alerts as they overlap significantly. That said, we continue to send out alerts warning sex workers of abusive clients through our various social media channels. Of note this year are two cases of customers using counterfeit notes; three customers pretending to be police officers in order to extort money or services from sex workers; and two cases of date rape. Unfortunately, only two of these cases were reported to the police: sex workers are fearful that they will be banned from re-entering Singapore (as sex workers are “prohibited migrant[s]” according to the Immigrations Act [Article 8 Section (3)(e)(f)]).
Project X gave a total of 31 public talks this year, in settings ranging from social awareness events to tertiary institutions. Through these talks, we take the opportunity to highlight the injustices that sex workers face, and encourage people to look at the laws and policies surrounding sex work through a critical lens. We urge our audiences to question their perceptions of sex workers and to be more aware of any unconscious biases.

Public talks are also an opportunity for us to invite sex workers to dialogue with members of the public. This firstly enables sex workers to see first hand that there are people who are genuinely interested in their stories, and who are keen to be allies. It also provides opportunities for sex workers to empower themselves through public speaking.

Public education is integral to our cause as it challenges some of the one-dimensional portrayals of sex workers perpetuated by the media and legislators. Through our talks we hope to encourage a more empathetic and active society.

One of our highlights for the year was speaking at National Education 3, A Queer Conference: Imagining Queer Futures. We had a panel discussion titled ‘LGBTQ People in Sex Work Advocacy’. Our researcher and writer Sherry moderated our 4 panelists: queer volunteer Yi Ting, queer volunteer coordinator Prashain, and transwomen sex workers, Sheeda and Nicole.

Some of the topics discussed included what the public can do to reduce social stigma and discrimination against sex workers and LGBTQ people, why it is important to build rapport between the community and allies, how this can help to combat the issues the communities face, and how the law or public opinion that affects sex workers also affects LGBTQ people who are not sex workers.

We had a great audience, and we hope we were able to build solidarity between the LGBTQ and sex worker movements.

Indignation 2018
Buck & Nisha

In 2018, we also had the honor of hosting two highly respected transgender activists: Buck Angel from the US, and Nisha Ayub from Malaysia.

The closed door and informal discussion was moderated by Sherry and attended by 20 people. Buck is famous for his prolific work on gender and sexual rights, while Nisha is the first transgender woman to be awarded the prestigious International Women of Courage Award in 2016. As they are both advocates for the transgender community, Project X thought it most befitting to hear them narrate their experiences and strategies in tackling the issues they face as trans people, and activists.

Their stories captured everyone's attention and touched their hearts. At the end of the day, Buck and Nisha encouraged us to love ourselves and our bodies, and in turn, challenge laws and mindsets that make us hate ourselves.

4 Community Events

The importance of bringing people from all walks of life together cannot be understated. Not only do community events serve to bridge the gap between the public and sex workers, they also serve as a platform where sex workers from different backgrounds can meet and find commonalities. By forging friendships through face-to-face connections, we hope that the women we assist feel that they have a support system here.

Building community support remains one of our more important objectives. Successful community support requires strong and positive engagement from those who attend our events. In this way, our events support and build trust and relationships so that sex workers feel comfortable sharing their views, values or concerns.

We truly believe that it is our duty and privilege to serve this community and it is integral for us to make them feel included. Community events do not just give us the opportunity to present our ideas, but also give us the chance to appreciate ideas that come from sex workers and others. We often draw inspiration and energy from these exchanges.
International Women’s Day

The first community event for 2018 was organized by our Human Rights Defender Program (HRDP) graduates! (Read more about the program in the next page, and in last year’s annual report.)

Our graduates - team Royal Queens Tea Party - decided that the best way to celebrate the end of the program was to organize a celebratory event for International Women’s Day (8th of March) and International Sex Workers’ Day (3rd of March). They invited workers from different districts to come together and encouraged them to build ties and celebrate each other on ISWD.

Women and their allies are using their voices to break the silence and advance an important conversation about sexual violence and the misogynistic power structures that enable it. However, sex workers are often left out of the conversation, and have yet to receive their #metoo moment.

The celebrations opened with a skit about abusive customers and customers who demand unsafe sex, and how to deal with them. It was an opportunity for all present to share their survival tips and tricks, and foster a sense of sisterhood.

“(It’s) great to know that you are not the only one trying to make everyone learn, teamwork (is when everyone is) eager (in) asking people to come to learn. Educating people is very satisfying; people call their friends and ask for favours just to make the event work.”

- Testimonial by HRDP Participant
Group 1 decided to plan an International Women’s Day event (as reported on the previous page).

Group 2 decided to plan a talk around topics less known to sex workers: the use of Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis, drug users’ support groups and therapy, and LGBTQ affirmative counselling. They invited trainers of the HRDP to give a talk to the wider community, in order to encourage a larger uptake of such services.

Finally, Group 3 decided to create a video using the skills they learnt in the Digital Storytelling workshop, to tell the story of why sex workers use drugs. They hoped to encourage a deeper understanding of addiction, and increased support for those experiencing it, which is deeply lacking.

At the evaluation, participants spoke about how they were able to apply the key skills learnt in their lives:

“Applied [these] skills once at my workplace. [A] person at my workplace wanted to kill herself because she lost her job. Consulted her and [she] started to cry. [She is] having good life now with her new job.”

“[At that time I] not only learned, but also [realised I went] through a lot of depression. Spoke to a trainer and got a lot of help, only because of him I actually went to IMH.”

- Testimonials from HRDP Participants

2017 saw the launch of our inaugural Human Rights Defender Program (HRDP), and 2018 saw the close of the program. The HRDP aimed to empower sex workers through equipping them with the relevant skills to aid other sex workers in their communities. The HRDP comprised numerous modules, and each module tackled a key issue facing the community, and focused on teaching a specific skill. The topics covered in 2017 included Digital Storytelling, Law and Human Rights, Gender, Race and Religion, Counselling and Suicide Intervention, and Mental Health and Sexual Health. We opened 2018 with a training on Financial Literacy conducted by PlayMoolah, and one on Project Management conducted by Professor Mohan Dutta, previously from the National University of Singapore.

The HRDP concluded with the nine participants splitting into three groups, and creating a mini project that was funded by the AWARE POWER Fund. Each group was given a mentor, and participants were guided in the planning, execution, and evaluation of their projects.

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Group 1’s rehearsals

Group 2’s presentation

Group 3’s video

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“The TRUTH ABOUT DRUGS!

I finally realised that I’m not only deprived of love but also a successful life with unconditional love even in failure or my imperfections.”

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Group 1’s rehearsals

Group 2’s presentation

Group 3’s video
When we think about health and wellness, many of us think about our physical or mental health, but rarely about our financial health, which is equally important. Financial wellness is a vital component of overall wellness. Therefore, Project X engaged the famed PlayMoolah to hold a workshop for the sex worker participants as part of our Human Rights Defender Program.

For sex workers, they oftentimes either have just enough, or not enough to make ends meet. Financial instability and the attendant uncertainty arises from various reasons, such as not having enough customers, having rent or debt that needs to be paid, or unforeseen expenses.

Over the course of the workshop held in January, attendees were given a safe space to talk about their finances in a deep and honest way. The environment that was created allowed healing and empowerment that transformed participants’ relationships to money, and encouraged small steps within a community of support, encouragement and healing. Participants were encouraged to identify less favourable financial behaviours, and brainstorm for possible solutions in order to create a healthier relationship with money, that is both more satisfying and less stressful for them.

We acknowledge that financial health is not something one can achieve through a one-time intensive workshop. However, we hope that we shared some skills that will help sex workers to persevere in times of economic hardship.

By managing day-to-day finances as well as seizing opportunities for financial security, sex workers will be able to create resilient and lasting strategies to carry them through the ups, downs, and everything in between.

“I learnt] not to live in denial. Face the fact that you need to budget so that you are able to know where your money goes to.”

“Plan ahead and prepare myself for emergencies. [This] impacted me in how I handled my money quite severely, learned to set aside different types for funds for different uses”

- Testimonials from HRDP Participants
Capacity Building

We strive to better ourselves to ensure that we deliver our mission to the best of our abilities. We continuously find ways to improve our short-term effectiveness, while concurrently fine-tuning our strategies to create an organisation that is sustainable.

The environment in which we operate has become increasingly complex and challenging, prompting the leadership of Project X to evaluate our abilities. The importance of capacity building has become more apparent to us, and we have involved ourselves in more events and trainings, as necessitated.

In 2018, we were involved in four capacity building initiatives, that allowed our staff and volunteers to develop competencies, skills, and the knowledge to mobilise our resources to provide better assistance to sex workers.

ASEAN Civil Society Conference

The ASEAN Civil Society Conference and ASEAN Peoples’ Forum (ACSC/APF), is a solidarity gathering of diverse civil society organisations (CSOs) in Southeast Asia. It carries a strong mandate to represent and strengthen ASEAN peoples’ voices, especially those from disadvantaged and marginalised groups. It aims to engage ASEAN member states and mechanisms, and does this by honoring the principles of mutual respect, integrity, joint development, and promoting peoples’ solidarity.

The conference focuses on ASEAN’s commitment to its people using the principles of human rights, democracy, equality, and development. This theme of the 2018 conference was “Empowering Peoples’ Solidarity Against All Forms of Discrimination”.

The engagement of ACSC/APF in the ASEAN process brings attention to the issues and concerns of its constituents: the working class, the peasantry, the urban poor, fisherfolk, women, children, the LGBT community, indigenous peoples, older persons, persons with disabilities, employees, professionals, migrants, and students.

Our researcher and writer, Sherry, first attended ACSC in 2015. After witnessing the solidarity in the region, she aggressively built her network with other organisations that advocate for sex workers and transgender people. This was put into play this year, when she was elected to be part of ACSC 2018 organising committee.
Before Project X could call it a wrap for the year 2018, we sent our key staff members Sherry and Wany to attend the Asia Pacific HIV Practitioners’ Course (APHPC). The APHPC is designed to improve the knowledge and skills of healthcare workers within the HIV sector throughout the Asia Pacific region. The 5-day course covered the medical health issues in relation to people living with HIV (PLHIV). This included a deeper understanding and management of drug use amongst PLHIV and populations of people at risk of contracting HIV. Building the capacity of our staff can positively influence how we care for the sex workers who come to us for health needs. Given the limited HIV training opportunities in the Asia Pacific region, the Asia Pacific HIV Practice Course (APHPC) aimed to improve knowledge and skills and encourage patient centered practices.

The course was jointly organized by the National University Hospital, Institute of Infectious Diseases and Epidemiology, Singapore General Hospital, and Action for AIDS, and is supported by the Society of Infectious Diseases (Singapore), the Chapter of Infectious Disease Physicians Singapore, and the Australasian Society for HIV, Viral Hepatitis and Sexual Health Medicine (ASHM).

A large part of Sherry and Wany’s work is to conduct STI tests, encourage HIV testing, accompany sex workers to seek treatment, and follow up with them. After attending the course, they both acquired a deeper understanding of HIV, a patient’s needs and how to better help them. On top of sharing what they learnt with our volunteers, they implemented an STI/HIV cheat sheet to better approach sex workers and engage their interest on the different types of sexual infections, testing, and treatments. We now have a team that is more confident, well equipped, and ready to answer all questions related to sexual health.
VOLUNTEERS

69 ACTIVE VOLUNTEERS

1349.5 VOLUNTEER HOURS

We pride ourselves in having a diverse group of volunteers, who come to Project X and share with us their passions, energies, and skills. From lawyers to students, from engineers to queer youth, we would not be where we are today without our volunteers.

This year, the majority of volunteer hours were spent on physical outreach (59.9%), doing groundwork and interacting with the sex workers. 15.6% of volunteer hours were spent on online outreach, and another 24.5% of volunteer hours were spent on office work, which consists of clerical work and letter writing. In 2018, we had a total of 69 volunteers, who contributed 1349.5 hours in total. The top three most active volunteers contributed 145, 126.5 and 125 hours respectively.

We are extremely grateful for our volunteers, who helped us to build relationships with sex workers and assist them with their cases, and helped spread the mission of Project X and increase awareness of sex workers’ situations in Singapore. We are also grateful to those who helped us to fundraise, who brought us food, and who helped us through challenging times.
Our volunteers who stand alongside us are integral to the mission we undertake, and truly play a vital role. On 7th December, we held our second Volunteer Appreciation Night at Out Bar, to celebrate their contributions and achievements. Project X is honored to have found a group of dedicated volunteers to call friends and allies.

2018 has been a year where we were able to continue to uphold the quality of services we render to the sex worker community. It has allowed us to reach sex workers in locations we never ventured into in the past. This year, more sex workers were willing to come up to our volunteers to report instances of abuse via our Abuser Alert system. It is also with the help of our volunteers that we were able to communicate with non-english speaking sex workers and were better able to serve them. We are incredibly thankful to our venue sponsor, Out Bar, for their support of our cause. On the night itself, our volunteer coordinator Prashain gave out several special mention awards to volunteers that have contributed significantly to Project X in 2018. Read more about what they have to say on the next page!

**AWARDEES!**

**Ying Shu**
Volunteering at Project X has connected me with a community of dedicated and open-minded people. I also appreciate the opportunity to understand a different side of our society, a more complicated yet real side. Most importantly, I feel empowered that with my little effort, we are creating a safer environment for sex workers.

**Megan**
My experience at Project X has been eye-opening and very meaningful thus far, and I am especially thankful for the patience and guidance of my supervisors as I try to navigate through issues and topics that I may be unfamiliar with. I am glad that I was given the chance to contribute to Project X’s mission and I greatly treasure the experiences I have had here as a volunteer.

**Small Mai**
It has been a humbling experience volunteering at Project X. They genuinely work to protect and promote sex workers’ rights, not as unwarranted saviours, but as helpful companions. You surround yourself with beautiful people inside and out when you’re with Project X.

**Dion**
Volunteering at Project X has been an immense learning opportunity for me. Aside from personal growth, it showed me the true facets of reality. It empowered me and equipped me with the resources to kick start the change I want to see.

**Atioah**
I enjoy the friendship built between us and sex workers because that trust serves as a means to better understand issues and how to combat them. I’m in gratitude of the support given to me by my mum, who I thought was a conservative Malay Muslim mum but turned out otherwise. And I thank Project X, both for making me feel that my position here is important in pushing this great movement. I’m proud to break out of that norm as a Malay Muslim lady and be a sex worker ally.

**Van**
Project X gave me the opportunity to break free of preconceptions, and respect people for their hard work and resilience instead of arrogantly judging the nature of their job and sexual or gender identities. I learn that even though there are differences between us, that doesn’t stop me from being friends with sex workers. Project X is a place where I can be comfortably myself without being judged, for me to develop an open mind and get to know like minded volunteers.
2018 FINANCES

INCOME: $82,036.86

Expenditure: $98,015.17

Support Us!
If you would like to make a donation, please make your cheque payable to Sunshine Initiative (Singapore), or bank transfer to:

United Overseas Bank Limited, Bank Code: 7375; Branch Code: 009; Account number: 3183049834

For more information, please go to our website: www.theprojectx.org