

## **PRESS RELEASE FROM THE WOMEN'S LIBRARY**

### **Prostitution: What's Going On?**

**21 September 2006 - 31 March 2007**

Challenging and provocative, *Prostitution: What's Going On?* is an exhibition and season of events at The Women's Library, London Metropolitan University, exploring the issues surrounding prostitution and trafficking, in the past and present. 2006 is the centenary of the death of the Victorian social reformer Josephine Butler, who successfully campaigned for the repeal of the brutal Contagious Diseases Acts in Britain during the 1870s and 1880s. In recognition of her pioneering work for the civil rights of prostitute women, The Women's Library has created an exhibition that will raise the issues that she dealt with over 100 years ago, and will question current debates against this historical framework.

Is it any easier, on the anniversary of Josephine Butler's death, to discuss prostitution today? Have the laws she campaigned against been consigned to history, or are double standards still alive and well across the globe? In responding to these questions, *Prostitution: What's Going On?* brings together for the first time historical material from the collections of The Women's Library and other lenders including photographs, magazines, posters, maps, testimonies and objects that highlight the complexity of concerns around prostitution and trafficking today.

The exhibition will present arguments relating to legislation and state regulation, including models that have been adopted in countries such as Holland, Germany, Sweden and New Zealand and will showcase recent research into global trafficking. The exhibition will pose questions for visitors, challenging them to think more deeply about their views and opinions, and to understand how media representations and cultural attitudes can shape our perceptions of this highly complex issue. *Prostitution: What's Going On?* also features multimedia work made in collaboration with partners Barnardo's, The POPPY Project and Curious as well as striking new photographic commissions by Veit Mette and Lydia Goldblatt.

The Women's Library and Barnardo's have worked in partnership on a creative writing project involving young people at risk of sexual exploitation. Supported by the Arts Council England, the project is entitled *Dear Diary* and involves six Barnardo's services for sexually exploited children and young people across the UK. A group of writers have facilitated creative sessions, with participants expressing their experiences in a range of diary formats. Creative work made during this process will be displayed as part of the exhibition.

The Women's Library and The POPPY Project brought together a group of trafficked women with an artist/filmmaker, Annis Joslin in April 2006. The group used a range of creative activities to explore issues around trafficking and prostitution. The result is a 12-minute film, *Sold Feelings*, which will be shown in a section of the exhibition that addresses ways of getting in and out of prostitution. This project was supported by The Indigo Trust. The exhibition is curated by Dr Liz Kelly, Professor of Sexualised Violence at London Metropolitan University, where she is also Director of the Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit ([CWASU](#)), and Gail Cameron, Curator of Special Collections at The Women's Library, London Metropolitan University.

## **Ends**

### **Notes to editors**

- Established in 1926, The Women's Library at London Metropolitan University houses one of the greatest collections of women's history in the world. The new, award winning venue opened its doors to the public in February 2002. The collections include posters, banners, books, magazines, photographs and other materials and are a celebration of the women's lives they document.
- The Women's Library holds the Josephine Butler Society Library - an unrivalled resource for the study of sexuality and public morality from the late nineteenth to the mid twentieth century. The printed materials include over 3,500 rare pamphlets and periodicals. There are 8 archives deposited including that of the Association for Social & Moral Hygiene, the organisation Butler founded and later known as the Josephine Butler Society. This archive comprises some 200 boxes containing the financial and administrative papers of the Society, including posters and flyers and over 400 photographs of Butler, her family and related campaigners. An additional archive contains over 2,500 letters by Butler.
- Josephine Butler campaigned for the repeal of the brutal Contagious Diseases Acts in Britain during the 1870s and 1880s. Under this legislation, women in port areas who were suspected of prostitution (however tenuously) could be arrested, subjected to brutal medical examination and imprisoned on the grounds of spreading venereal disease. Butler campaigned tirelessly for 17 years for the repeal of this law, which criminalized women without any consideration of male involvement. The Acts were finally repealed in 1886. As well as achieving the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, Butler led resistance to attempts at state regulation - in Britain and

internationally - which denied prostitute women civil rights, and then worked to raise the age of consent in the UK from 12 to 16. From 1875 until the end of her life, she worked with European colleagues in the **International Abolitionist Federation**, which she founded to combat sexual trafficking and the state regulation of prostitution worldwide.

- There is a schools programme accompanying the exhibition, exploring issues around prostitution, sexual exploitation, the sex industry and sex trafficking. We are offering a 2-hour workshop consisting of a guided visit to the exhibition and a facilitated debate, with supporting resource pack and additional provision for teachers. The workshops are suitable for A2 and AS level students, primarily in Sociology and Media Studies, but also support skills in critical thinking, debating and citizenship

- Barnardo's is the UK's leading children's charity, supporting 120,000 children and their families through 370 services in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Barnardo's works with the most vulnerable children and young people, helping them transform their lives and fulfil their potential. Barnardo's has 15 services in the UK supporting sexually exploited children and young people.

- The POPPY project provides support and housing to women who have been trafficked into prostitution. The project is run by Eaves, a charity formed as Homeless Action in 1977 which aimed to provide high quality supported housing to single homeless women. Funded by the Home Office and the Association of Local Government (ALG), POPPY combines direct services, support and advocacy with research, development and lobbying. This allows the project to bridge the gaps between theory, practice and the need to influence strategy.

- Exhibition opening hours: Monday to Friday 9.30am - 5.30pm (late night opening Thursday 8pm), Saturday 10.00am - 4.00pm, Sunday closed.

- The Women's Library, London Metropolitan University, Old Castle Street, London E1 7NT, t: 0207 320 2222 or visit [www.thewomenslibrary.ac.uk](http://www.thewomenslibrary.ac.uk)

**For further PRESS information, images or to arrange an interview with the exhibition curators please contact:**

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