

My Touching Base Workshop Experience

Prior to the Scarlet Alliance conference in Sydney last November, I participated in a workshop with Touching Base, called the Professional Disability Awareness Training (PDAT).

Touching Base Inc is an organisation based in Sydney – a perfect collaboration between sex workers and people with disabilities. The Touching Base Inc Committee of Management includes individual people with disabilities and sex workers. People with a disability have an intrinsic right to sexual expression. This right enables people to develop relationships, have sex, explore and express their sexuality and achieve intimacy without personal or systemic barriers.

Touching Base Inc's aims to:

Facilitate the links between people with a disability, their support organisations and the sex industry
Encourage information sharing and educational training programs for sex workers, people with a disability and their carers.

Raise the public and professional awareness of the issues surrounding the access and provision of sex industry services for people with a disability.

Both groups face similar stigma and discrimination from the general community. Why I was keen to do this workshop was to develop more skills as a sex worker and gain more knowledge around how to handle clients with various types of disabilities.

Rachel and Saul, both very talented and inspirational sex workers, conducted the workshop. Various speakers spoke about their experience about accessing sex.

Unlike able body people, there are many barriers for people with a disability to meet and form relationships and to be able to have a fulfilling sexual relationship. Often they are at the mercy of their carers or well-meaning family members who are concerned about their wellbeing but forget that it is a natural human need to be a sexual being. Sex workers can offer so much to these marginalised people. Given the opportunity to explore their sexuality will indeed be a big step for a lot of people with disabilities and certainly give them a lot to smile about.

During the course of the workshop both Rachel and Saul shared their extensive experience and gave an insight to various ways to overcome hurdles when delivering a

service to a person with a disability. The most important message I received was always treat your client with respect and dignity. The best tool you can have is the ability to communicate so that all is understood during the service. It is of enormous benefit if a working relationship with the carer can be established.

We watched a DVD, *Untold Desires*, which featured people with various forms of disabilities discussing their sexuality, their desires and their fears. This helped to myth bust a lot of preconceived and totally incorrect assumptions around people with disabilities and their sexuality. It opened the door to heartfelt discussion around the values and the attitudes that impact on people with disabilities.



David shared his experience as a disabled person in a wheel chair and extensive restrictions on the use of all his limbs about his first time at a brothel. It gave us an insight to the overwhelming hurdles that he had to overcome to have sex. He gave a very open and detailed description with a large dose of humour.

Ramiro, an Occupational Therapist showed us lifting techniques, how to look after our backs and how to support the client. We had fun practising the techniques shown to us.

Denise who is a staff member with People With Disability Australia (PWD) spoke to us about being in control of the Referral List. This list has names of sex workers who have the skills and are prepared to spend time with people with disabilities. It is kept under lock and key and confidentiality is of highest priority. A person with a disability can call and source

referrals to appropriate sex workers for their needs.

I found this workshop very informative and would recommend any sex worker to participate. It will enhance your skills as a sex worker, offer more opportunity to earn money and also be rewarded with the satisfaction that you have truly made a difference to someone's well being.

For more information around Touching Base Inc. check out their web site www.touchingbase.org

Cheers, Chrissy