

## **‘Understanding Society, Advocate for Human Rights’ Community Integration Program**

With the funding support of the Committee on the Promotion of Civic Education, AFRO ran a 5-month *‘Understanding Society, Advocate for Human Rights’* project between July 2007 and December 2007. With the belief of ‘everyone is born equal’, we hope for the wider society to live in harmony with sex workers, to understand and to know them from different aspects of life.

Participants joined a five-session ‘Get to Know Human Rights’ workshop. In order to understand a step further the environment in which sex workers work and also how and in what situations their human rights may be infringed, participants along with AFRO staffs engaged in outreach visits to different work venues of sex workers.

During the last stage of the workshop, AFRO encouraged participants to step up to the concepts of ‘eliminate prejudice’, ‘communicate acceptance’. Participants worked with seven sex workers to create seven photographs that were presented for public display at the TST Star Ferry Pier on December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2007. These seven photographs were not artistic showpieces; these were reflections of sex workers’ desires to be understood and not left isolated.

December 9<sup>th</sup> was also AFRO’s annual fundraising day. Under AFRO’s staffs, volunteers and women peers’ voices of appeal, not only did this year’s donations increased, it also boosted up the rather quiet atmosphere of the photography show.

AFRO believe: sex is not a crime; it is innate to bring joy, births and bonds between people, families...sexual workers are not sinners; they are women, mothers, daughters, and important pillars within families. As long as everyone values respect and acceptance, and understands equal rights (including occupational choices), sex workers’ bravery to step out of prejudiced shadows and into the sunlight of the happier, wider society is very well achievable.

## **International Human Rights Day Exhibition**

On December 10<sup>th</sup>, 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations proclaimed the 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights', and its vision is 'all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights'. Every year on the 10<sup>th</sup> of December, Human Rights Day marks the adoption of the Universal Declaration.

On December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2007, 28 organizations joined together to advocate the importance of human rights. In addition to this year's theme '**Say No to Rights Infringement**', the focuses were also on police's abuse of power, cultural and sexual orientation discriminations, etc. With AFRO's involvement, we hope the community can gain insights into the realities of sex trade, and to share experiences of this occupation's safety hazards, because AFRO believe as the society progresses, we need to accept differences and push for societal harmony regardless of educational levels, classes, religious believes or occupational backgrounds.

That day, there were different community members who believe sex workers are an unethical bunch, but we were also happy to see others who took the time to listen and understand our mission; although they did not immediately accept this occupation, they respected the choices these sex workers make. Our colleagues felt the community's views moved towards more acceptance and less discrimination; this strengthened AFRO's work and mandate, and with the community's support, the dreary road ahead will be worth the hard work.

### **AFRO's Clinic**

From August 2007, the AFRO's clinic already conducted checkups on 180 people. Everyone was especially pleased with the doctor's patience. We anticipate sex workers' visits to increase.

In addition, we started our outreach consultation service in October, where Dr. Fong was accompanied by one AFRO staff to visit bars to perform checkups on sexually infected diseases. With the support from bars' owners, the checkups went smoothly and were welcomed by sex workers. This service was especially convenient and helpful for those women without HKID, and for

the next 2 years, they will no longer have to pay for expensive consultation fees.

## **Outreach to Macau**

On November 21<sup>st</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2007, three AFRO staffs, along with Assistant Professor Susanne Choi and six students from the Chinese University of Hong Kong went for a Macau outreach program. The purpose was to support the Department of Sociology's project on sex workers. Macau's Center for Disease Control and Prevention also participated.

Our destination included Iao Hon and Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro. Iao Hon is an older, rougher area. This area's sex workers are mainly from mainland China, older work on the streets, and their minimum charge is around \$50. Their health knowledge was average, and the working conditions were worse than the ones in Yau Ma Tei area in HK. Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro's sex workers are also from mainland China, a little younger work out of hostels, and their charge is around \$200. Overall, this outreach was very memorable.

AFRO's staffs believe it is worth to expand the outreach program, and will further discuss this opportunity with Macau's Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

## **In Talks with Law Enforcement**

**AFRO** held a news conference on August 2007 regarding occupational safety for sex workers. The Chair of the Police Inspectors' Association, Inspector Tony Liu, responded via newspaper, stating if sex workers experienced unjust treatment by police, including using their service without paying, sex workers should immediately report the incidents; otherwise, it will be very difficult to follow-up. The police are also very willing to work with sex workers and their organizations to teach them how to recognize fraudulent police officers, and how to preserve evidence for police to investigate on the incident. On November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2007, we invited Inspector Liu to a face-to-face discussion session. Besides AFRO staffs, two volunteers and four sex workers also participated. With regards to on-the-job policies, Inspector Liu cannot answer on behalf of the police force, he only explained police procedures and ethical standards of random checks/visits, and from this information, along with the

police force, we hope to pick out corrupted officers.

Even though there were no major breakthroughs during this discussion, and some of our inquiries remain unanswered, this was a first in terms of direct conversation with law enforcement personnel.

## **New Blood Again!**

Last issue we introduced our male colleague, ***Kam Man Fai***, this time we will continue to introduce another young and pretty member. She is one of our Programme Officers :

*“Hello all! I am Chan Ka Che, or you can call me Connie. I am happy to be part of AFRO and to see you all. Hopefully I will see you in the center!”*

## **Fund Raising Activity**

**“I remember you guys; I supported your last fundraising campaign too!”**

Under the support of volunteers and fellow women, the second fundraising campaign of the year ended on December 9<sup>th</sup> 2007 near the TST Star Ferry Pier.

All participated AFRO staffs, volunteers and women worked hard. Products included toys and gifts, all donated from good citizens, and passers-by could not help but stop to choose those items that catches the eye. One elderly even recognized our fundraising at the beginning of the year. After a hard day's work, our efforts paid off; the proceeds almost doubled from the last fundraising campaign.

We hope to continue to receive support and participation in our next campaign.

## **Walk-A-Thon**

This year's walk-a-thon will be on April 6<sup>th</sup> 2008, details will be available in due time.

This year is AFRO's 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary; we hope more women and friends of

AFRO's can take the time to participate, together for the start of another 15 years!

## **AFRO Leaflet**

A new AFRO leaflet created by the staff has already finished printing. A donation form is also attached. If you are willing to give constant support to our work, welcome to complete and return to AFRO.

Thank you!

## **AFRO is now Online!**

After years of preparations, our website (in Chinese) is finally online! From now on, you can get AFRO's latest news on [www.afro.org.hk](http://www.afro.org.hk). The English version will be launched in March 2008.

## **Christmas Party**

Our Christmas party was successfully held on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2007 Wednesday from 4pm to 6pm. Thanks to those who came and contributed! Without their active participation, this party would not have been so wonderful. This year was a special one because we did not order any catering service. Instead, we made our own food – curry fish ball, swiss chicken wing, mango glutinous rice dessert, etc. Everyone enjoyed it to the point that almost nothing was left behind at the end of the party. We of course must, once again, thank every single one of you for your generous support!

Other than our staff member Connie, Kam, Sylvan and Victoria, we were grateful to have our exco member, Susanne and also our volunteer, Catherine and Cherry, being with us. What's more, we were most thankful for the big gift Ah Chung from AIDS Concern donated!

We hope to see you all again next year! Do come and have fun together!

## **New Experience for Sex Workers**

**AFRO** received support from the Red Ribbon Center to produce an AIDS-related program, during the write-up of the proposal, we thought we should invite sex workers to participate in the production, so they could use their experience to spread AIDS prevention information to their peers, and also to let the society know sex workers are also concerned about their own health, and are knowledgeable about AIDS. In order to raise their interests, we chose to use an interactive method for production, and that is to self-record an educational short film and distribute the DVD during our outreach visits.

For the two sex workers who participated, this was a brave effort, because all tasks were hands-on, from the creation of the film's contents, script, to going onto the streets to interview people, doctors, and their fellow sex workers; all participating volunteers and sex workers were very involved.

We believe there are a lot of potential in sex workers, as long as the society can give reassurance, it is not difficult to raise their confidence. Following are the voices from the two sex workers who participated in the project:

*“I am very happy AFRO invited me to participate in this AIDS project. At first I was scared, did not know what to do, but luckily I had help from others, and at the same time I want to tell the other sisters about AIDS prevention.” ~ **Suet Yee***

*“Very happy! At first when AFRO's staff approached me for this project, I was scared, but later, given the guidance, I slowly developed confidence; street interviews were most nerve-racking, but the output was good. Through the doctor's interviews I gained knowledge on AIDS. I enjoyed every part of my involvement!” ~ **Hoi Man***