

## **Celebrating Canadian Women's History Month – Sex-Trade Workers and the Advancement of Women's Equality.**

Victoria – On October 18<sup>th</sup>, 1929 the Privy Council of the UK asked the question: “To those who ask why the word ‘person’ should include females, the obvious answer is, why should it not?” In asking the question, the Council overturned Canada’s Supreme Court decision that women were not, in fact, persons in the law. Since that important case, women have been gaining ground in the legal recognition of their rights and experiences; but many women continue to live on the margins of those rights.

“Sex workers exist in the margins of the margins in most of our communities,” says Jody Paterson, Executive Director of the Prostitutes Education and Empowerment Society. “Outdoor workers in particular routinely experience violence on the job, and are denied the most basic rights of fair treatment and a safe workplace.”

West Coast Legal Education and Action Fund is thrilled to welcome Ms Paterson and Lauren Casey of the National Coalition of Experiential Women as guest speakers at its annual Persons Day Breakfast on October 17<sup>th</sup> between 7:00-9:00am. These dynamic women have been at the forefront of establishing a space where sex-trade workers can find support, education, and community acceptance.

In all the programs and services, PEERS staff members use their own life experiences to know where and how to connect with sex trade workers. They understand how isolating work in the sex trade can be and thus speak out publicly against the abuse and stigmatization of prostitutes. PEERS provides tangible resources for women on the margins such as ELEMENTS, a multi-phase program designed for those wanting to transition from the sex trade toward mainstream employment and/or education. This unique organization also empowers prostitutes through less traditional services such as the weekly Beauty Day, where women can receive manicures, massages, and acupuncture, as well as through art and writing workshops. A powerful example of one of this creative collaboration is “Stories on the Margins” which can be viewed on the website: [www.peers.bc.ca/stories.html](http://www.peers.bc.ca/stories.html).

Women need an active voice in the courts to change the lives of girls and women in Canada. Since 1985, West Coast LEAF's involvement in various cases has ensured that the equality provisions of the Charter are interpreted in a way that reflects the reality of women's lives. West Coast LEAF strives to build on the successes of cases like the Persons Case, and make the promise of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms a reality for all Canadians. Access to justice in Canada is at great risk – cuts to legal aid and important programs such as the Court Challenges Program make voices such as those of the women of PEERS harder and harder for Canada’s lawmakers to hear. And without those voices, recognition of the personhood of all Canadians is at risk.

- 30 -

For more information contact:

Alison Brewin, Executive Director  
West Coast LEAF

604-684-8772 ext 111 [exec@westcoastleaf.org](mailto:exec@westcoastleaf.org)