

Chris Kirby of the Chris Kirby and the Marquee band performs during the second-annual Telegram Stars for Warm Hearts benefit for Iris Kirby House concert on Saturday night at the St. John's Arts & Culture Centre. — Photos by Joe Gibbons/The Telegram

... purchased tickets offered the applause.
 "It's just very, very heartwarming for me to see that all these artists came together for that cause," said Tara Bradbury, the Telegram arts reporter who created the campaign. "Nobody was paid. They were all donating their time ... and on a Saturday night, they could be playing, making money downtown."
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Local comedian John Sheehan from Harbour Grace hosted the show.

SOCIETY

Negative attention given to massage parlour ad unnecessary: students

By JOSH PENNELL
 THE TELEGRAM

A recent ad posted around Memorial University looking to hire young women for a massage parlor drew negative attention from both the student body and the public recently because of its sexual connotations and the demographic of workers it seemed to be targeting.

One group of sociology students at MUN, though, says the ad was just a job posting and the only thing being violated by the attention it's getting are the rights of people who choose such a line of work.

"As women are a dominating gender that is working in the sex trade, we just basically want to raise awareness that it's a women's choice to use your body however

she wishes to use it," says Nicole Macdonald Lynch.

The ad for Sherry's Sugar Shack called for hostesses to provide company and massages to clients. It said nothing of hostesses having sex with clients but it was rife with sexual insinuations and was criticized by many.

Unnecessarily so, says Lynch.

"We feel that it wasn't an attack against human rights. It was just more so a job posting."

She and her university mates Holly Hunt, Ashley Snook and Chelsea Collings were actually calling around to other massage parlors in the city the day the story broke about Sherry's Sugar Shack as part of a project they're doing for a social policy class.

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(From left) Ashley Snook, Holly Hunt and Nicole Macdonald Lynch say the negative reaction to the ad for Sherry's Sugar Shack is more of a human rights issue than the ad itself. — Photo by Josh Pennell/The Telegram

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MY VISION We know your Say goodbye to glasses laser vision correcti

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Their focus is looking at the rights of sex trade workers. The outcry against the ad illustrates the stigma associated with the sex trade, the group says, and it doesn't help the people who do get involved in that industry.

"It's happening everywhere. It's time for our city to wake up and acknowledge this population of people. I don't think it was as appalling as some people perceived it to be. And I don't think it was an attack on women's rights. I think that it was just a job ad and the fact that so many people from the university got up in arms about it being placed there, as opposed to actually thinking about the women who actually chose to go into this profession, I think it's kind of naive."

The laws on prostitution in Canada can be confusing. Cecilia Benoit is a professor of sociology at the University of Victoria. She's in town for six weeks as part of a national research project to learn extensively about the lives of people working in the sex trade industry. She says that unlike the states, in Canada it's not illegal to buy and sell sex. What's illegal is to communicate in public about the buying and selling of sex, and you're

not allowed to provide sex for sale in the same place repeatedly. Also, you can't live on the avails of prostitution like someone who has prostitutes working for them. Benoit says the manager of a massage parlor could be accused of living off the avails of prostitution if it was discovered that more than just massaging was going on.

As part of her study, Benoit is interviewing people who are involved in, or affected by, the sex trade in many ways, including escorts and prostitutes, but also people who are the managers of businesses such as massage parlours, and even the police who deal with the issue of the sex trade from a law enforcement aspect.

"It's a fairly complex study. I'm trying to understand the different contexts that people find themselves in whether it's the family context, the work context, the municipal laws and how they all factor into the health and safety of the people involved," says Benoit.

In less than a week, Benoit has already gotten five interviews in St. John's.

She says many people can't understand why others get involved in this



MUN students (from left) Ashley Snook, Holly Hunt discuss the reaction to an ad for Sherry's Sugar Shack th

— Photo by Josh Pennell/The Telegram

area of work, but the reasons vary.

"It's been a pretty revealing study so far. You start talking to people who are so very diverse, who in some ways are very, very savvy ... very, very good business people."

Some are making practical decision about taking care of their children. Others have dreams, goals and careers they're working towards, she says. That includes university students from other parts of the country with whom she has spoken who are involved in the industry part time, and see it as a way to help them get

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josh.pennell@thetelegram.com

The Western Star

People affected by sex trade ...Continued from page A1

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MUN students (from left) Ashley Snook, Holly Hunt and Nicole Macdonald Lynch discuss the reaction to an ad for Sherry's Sugar Shack that circulated at the university.

— Photo by Josh Pennell/The Telegram

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Some are making practical decision about taking care of their children. Others have dreams, goals and careers they're working towards, she says. That includes university students from other parts of the country with whom she has spoken who are involved in the industry part time, and see it as a way to help them get

on with their careers that aren't associated with the sex trade industry.

Benoit saw the story break here over Sherry's Sugar Shack.

"It was too bad. It was probably somebody trying to open a massage parlor and wasn't that used to knowing how to go about doing it," she says.

Benoit says advertising in the university wasn't the brightest move because of the attention it gathered and also the fact that it was interpreted as profiteering from a vulnerable group, young students with high debt

loads, regardless if it was trying to do that or not.

She said she feels the media exploited the story to make a bigger deal out of it than it really was, because these places already exist here and advertise online without anybody making a peep about them. She adds that exploiting vulnerable people into the sex industry is clearly immoral, but people in university are adults and can make decisions for themselves.

Lynch and her group share those feelings and think that a regulated sex trade industry would help remove the stigma associated with it, because it would become more of an accepted form of work rather than one that's seen as vulgar. Also, the people working in it would have better, safer lives, they say.

They have set up an email account for anyone who wants to send them questions, comments, stories, or concerns under wakeupst.johns@hotmail.com.

Benoit is encouraging anybody who would like to take part in her study to check out the website www.understandingsexwork.ca.

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