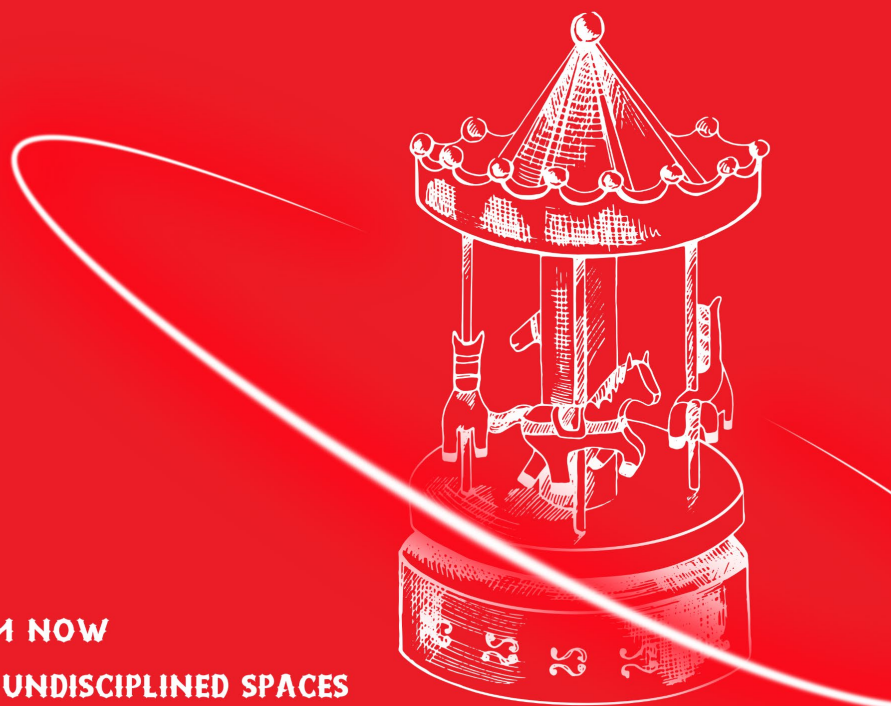


Undisciplined Spaces: Red Light Carnival

A Decrim Funfair
in collaboration with Decrim Now

Red Light Carnival
A DECRIM FUNFAIR



DECRIM NOW
KCL – UNDISCIPLINED SPACES

PROJECT SUMMARY

The project was an interactive fun-fair to spread information and awareness about the challenges and issues that Sex Workers face in the UK, an environment without full decriminalisation. The community partner was [Decrim Now](#), an advocacy group of sex workers and allies who advocate for full decriminalisation of sex work in the UK.

The exhibition format was suggested by *Decrim's* membership. So often the challenges that Sex Workers face are presented in a dire and dark light. This format offered an alternative way to engage with these issues, lowering barriers to access and promoting the positive changes that decriminalisation can achieve, rather than a one-dimensional negative outlook of the serious issues faced. It is not the work itself that necessarily generates negativity; it is the social stigma and legal challenges that often generate this.

ROAD TO THE PROJECT

We first reached out to *Decrim Now* and a few other advocacy groups (e.g. *SWARM* and *English Collective of Prostitutes*). *Decrim Now* replied positively soon after, and the lead contact there was a fantastic person to work with. They had the ideas, influence, and energy to make dreams into reality. We set up weekly meetings on a Friday to touch base on development. We decided that *Decrim Now* would hold three workshops with members of the sex work community. The goal of these workshops was to design the exhibition's contents through a process of open collaboration. As anonymity is important in this sector, we offered financial and organisational support from afar but did not attend the workshops.

After these workshops, the ideas that were most intriguing and pragmatically achievable were selected. Next came planning to source the different materials, create the 'stalls', and to secure a venue.

We were fortunate enough to successfully apply for a place in Sanctuary Season which provided the programme with £500 production costs funding,



access to space, and the organisation aid of the Culture Team, who were fantastic – with a special shoutout to Laura L'Aimable.

Venues are tricky, even within the university. Our first venue's purpose was changed at the last minute and we had to pivot to another. In searching for another, we met some challenges. One example, was KCL mandating catering for the hire of one space which exceeded the budget. Thankfully, the Sanctuary team helped us to find another exhibition space, The Inigo Rooms, and this space ended up being perfectly sized for the exhibition we wanted to put on. The support of Emma Libonati and Chelsea McDonagh of the *Undisciplined Spaces* programme was also invaluable, as we had the confidence to manoeuvre through challenging conversations.

With *Decrim* heading up the design of the stalls, we kept in touch and counted down the days to install.

WHAT HAPPENED?

A resounding success is what happened.

The exhibition opened after a manic two days of installing. The opening saw over one-hundred people join. The opening boasted face-painting, tarot readings, immersive performers, and live music. Attendees played carnival games which gave them information and insight into the benefits of full decriminalisation. We were generously donated condoms by Pasante for the “guess the number of condoms in the jar” game, as well as more safer sex supplies from Positive East. Proper Popcorn also sent over 100 bags of popcorn for guests attending the opening night! We want to share extra thanks to these organisations for supporting the cause.

Over the next two weeks, we manned the exhibition and hosted harm reduction talks with local community heroes Redux Rats. One day we also hosted a crochet workshop, drawing in the themes

of “women’s work”. The duration of the exhibition welcomed a greater range of attendees than a shorter event would have. This was especially important for people who were curious but had not engaged with these issues before, and for students of KCL, especially as cost of living pressures mount and more students than ever before are supplementing their income with various forms of sex work, often without the knowledge or community to safeguard themselves.

In all we had over **500** attendees, with over 150 at the opening night and nearly 80 on the closing day

Project Impact

Some of the project’s impact is best described by this image, which is first-hand commentary feedback offered by attendees, which was overwhelmingly positive. See the responses to the online form below, and pictures of the in-person feedback cards attached at the end.

Can you tell us a bit about what you learned or new perspectives you gained?	We are interested in how audiences are emotionally connecting with the events in the Lost and Found season. How did tonight's event make you feel?	What could have been improved about this event?
I learned about a completely new topic to me that I'm newly super passionate about!	I felt inspired, energised, and cared for. Masks-required events are inspiring events for medically vulnerable folks and people who care about accessibility. Thank you, thank you, thank you!	No notes; this was spectacular!
I learned a lot about the different legislations that exist and how they fail to protect sex workers.	Baffled by the discrimination and lack of support for sex workers.	
I know quite a bit anyway, so prob no new perspectives	Felt empty for sex workers but did previously as well	While I completely support sex workers as an ally, I found the funfair very amateur, quality of exhibits and presentation mainly. I felt glad I didn't invite people who needed to be convinced by decrim, I'm sad to say
I learned so much about sex workers and the importance of decriminalisation. I thought it was incredibly well done. One of my favourite exhibitions I've been to this year, if not the best one.	Inspired and connected.	
It was so interactive and really helpful for gaining personal perspectives on sex work. It really showed that sex work is not just about abuse or trafficking and highlighted the real people behind it and why decriminalisation is so important.	It made me feel inspired to be more supportive of sex workers and decrim.	There were a lot of leaflets and handouts, but some were display only, which were cool to see, but I would have loved access to a digital library of resources so I could look at home.
I learnt more about the laws surrounding sex work and received a lot of resources.	As someone within the sex industry I enjoyed it. It made me happy their was a event for sex workers.	I wish it was going on London

Initially this was meant to be a pilot event for *Decrim Now* to hold a larger event. Given the size of the event, this became not only a pilot but a major event in itself. *Decrim Now* will reuse the materials and format on different scales to continue to spread awareness and advocate for policy change. One impact of the project was giving *Decrim Now* the experience and resources to expand their programme and reach, and ultimately advocate more effectively for change, including more members on the way.

Members of the public and of the university walked away with more information and a better understanding of the potential benefits of full decriminalisation, and of the everyday experiences of Sex Workers in the UK. One member of the philosophy department brought a policeman friend there, and he said he would advocate within his department for changed behaviours as a result. One of our team's supervisors made attendance to the exhibition mandatory for the undergraduate module being taught. We received multiple messages of satisfaction and thanks, and even messages of love blossoming as two different sets of people who met at the exhibition began to date.

Challenges

There was a noticeable lack of accessibility of King's spaces to the general public, and to those with health requirements. We set two days as "clean air days" where we required attendees to wear masks when walking around the space, to make the exhibition accessible to those who required mask wearing - something regularly requested in community spaces. We received push back around this from KCL communications and it was a challenge to explain that this was a request in order to make marginalised people feel safe, rather than to limit the freedoms of those who don't usually wear masks. However, we are so glad we pushed for this, as we received moving feedback from attendees on this day that it made them feel welcome, and safe, with one attendee saying it was the first time they'd been able to go out and enjoy an exhibition in a long time due to their health complications.



The level of barriers to entry for members of the public was another challenge. Given the topics of the exhibition, around harmful policing of sex workers and exclusion from public spaces, it was disappointing to hear many attendees discuss how they had been turned away or redirected by members of security and only managed to find us through their sheer perseverance. This is not a criticism of the security team, who were generally very helpful, however it is indicative of King's policy for making it very hard for members of the public to enter university space. This does a disservice to the attempts to bridge gaps between the public and the academy and pushes us further away from "the real world". One wheelchair user was sent around the houses for 30 minutes before finally reaching us, because the doors at Somerset House were blocked by the ice rink. This was a learning for us too, that we should have prioritised making clear videos about how to access the space from all angles, and for keeping up regular communication with the security team about the exhibition and who might be attending.

What we learned

Collaboration is *really hard* and *really amazing*. Key to successful collaboration is *time*, *contact* and *flexibility*.

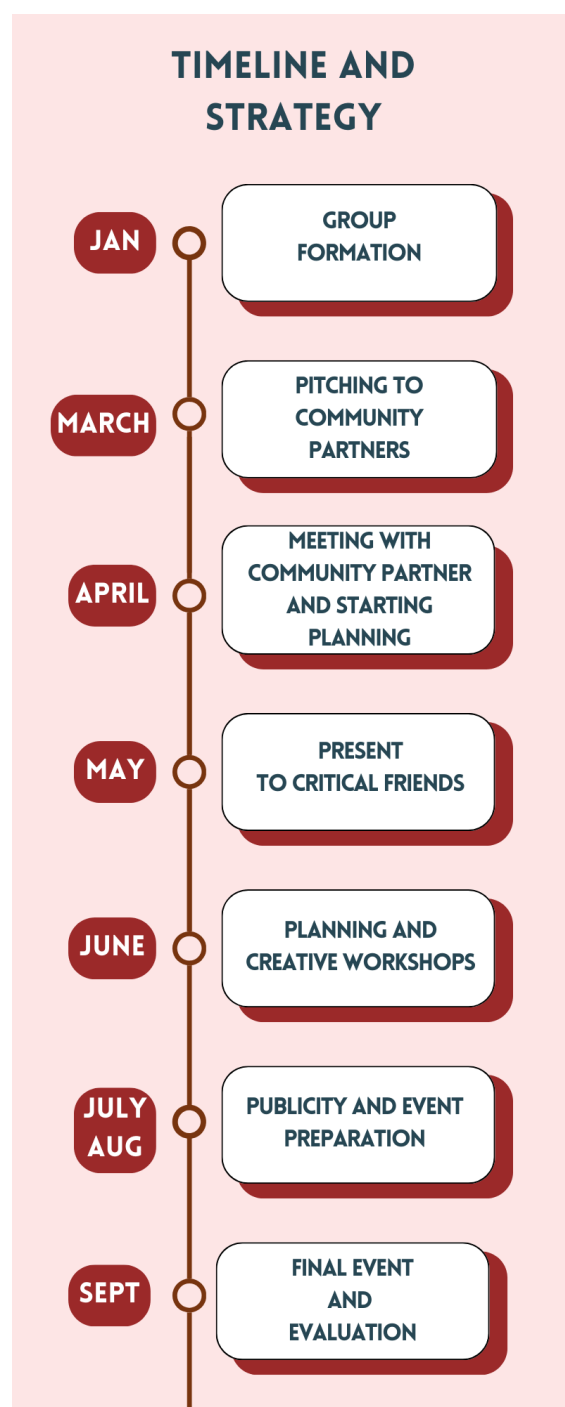
Finding the right people to work with, within the team and in the community partner (if possible) is an absolute essential; we wouldn't have been able to do it without an incredible community partner who deserves as much credit as we can possibly give.

Beware of scope creep! One major thing was that we didn't realise the exhibit would need to be manned by at least 1 (and preferably 2) of us for every opening day. This required a final massive time commitment from everyone. Initially this started out as a pilot. As it ballooned because of more money, capacity, and enthusiasm, it was a little hard to keep control of the scope. That said, I think we are all happy with how big and successful it was.

Exit strategy needs / needed a bit more work (we had timetabled ourselves to death within it and we're now a bit late getting it all out).

Going Forward

The next step is to apply for more money! This will enable us to help *Decrim Now* continue to develop their programme and advocate more successfully, as well as ensure that the money and time that went into the original project become an *investment* for future activities, rather than a one-off consumable. We are grateful to have built a strong relationship with our community partner which we envision continuing for as long as the fight for decrim is needed!



Below: 'Defining Decrim' Wall, interactive activities and prizes, and reflections from our visitors.



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For further information:
Email: ah-impact@kcl.ac.uk
Or visit: www.kcl.ac.uk/artshums/research/impact