

**"I cherish the  
freedom I get in  
sex work"**

**Sinanzi**



Photo: Madelene Cronjé / Text: Victoria John

## Sinanzeni, Bulawayo

When I was 15, I was living with my stepmother and father in Bulawayo. I made friends with the girls in my neighbourhood and started going with them to the bars in town and that's when I started the sex work. One night, my father got a tip-off where I was and followed me there with policemen in an undercover car. They took me to the juvenile detention centre and I stayed there maybe a year. I developed high blood pressure from being there. Others were running away and I wanted to go with them but where would I go? To my father? He would just chase me away. We didn't get school lessons there and before I was sent to a centre in Harare where I could continue school, they decided that my heart was too bad and I was sent home to my father. But he did things like hid my belongings, it was bad... so I moved out and stayed with a friend of mine.

### **So many challenges**

A distant relative eventually got me a single room and this is where I really started doing sex work. I learned that I could just go and work on the

street. There were so many challenges. The other sex workers would say I was stealing their clients and would get gangsters to beat me up. Clients were violent. I slept the one night next to a knife that a client had put next to me on the bed to kind of threaten me. Also the police arrest us randomly. One night, I was arrested with some other sex workers and the commanding officer let everyone go except me. I stayed, and he raped me. Another night, two policemen and two policewomen arrested us and drove us around town. When they would see water on the street they would make us get out and roll all around in it. It was winter. Then we would stand up and they would make us do frog jumps.

They told us 'Now go do your work'. But then we told the Sexual Rights Centre (SRC) and we went to the police station to identify them and they were arrested.

**"I like my purple hair because I like colourful things. Some of the men compliment me and tell me I'm beautiful. Other men ask me my rate and then beat me up."**

#### **Support from the Hands Off programme**

Most of my support is from the Hands Off programme. I used to face discrimination at health centres but they referred us to the clinics of Population Services International (PSI) and it is better there. When we have challenges in town - maybe I have been violated or something like that - we tell the SRC and they come and get us and either bring us to the office which is a safe space or take us to the police station to open a case. When I'm not feeling well, they take me to get pills. The only thing I need from the SRC is that they continue their work and do not tire. My education is not enough to do another job but if I could do other work it would be knitting. I would knit clothes like jerseys.

#### **Sex work should be supported**

I think sex work should be supported and what I want people to know is that this is my primary income and other women's primary income. If sex work is criminalised then that compromises my income and people should know that I am supporting my mother and my baby with this income. My baby is seven years old. I cherish the freedom I get in sex work. On days I don't feel like working, I don't work. I just stay at home. I cook, I clean. I sit there and watch TV with my baby.

