

Lindiwe

"Our health is the most important thing"







Photo: Madelene Cronje / Text: Victoria John

## Lindiwe, Bulawayo

I was working as a maid and providing for three children and my mother. The money was too small. Then I met Sinanzeni and she taught me how to be a sex worker. Initially I was pained by people calling me one of the 'amawule' which means people who are immoral misfits and bitches who steal peoples' husbands. I used to fight with them. It was so difficult.

The police were always chasing us. They would search us and take away our condoms. They would rape us. One night the police took us around town and made us roll around in puddles. It was also hard when clients would get the sex they wanted and then not pay. Who do you report that to? The police told us we shouldn't come to them so we had nowhere to turn.

### **Police asked us for a bribe**

The one morning we had finished our night of work and were ordering fast food from a corner shop. We were dressed in regular clothes. The

police put handcuffs on us and asked us for a bribe to avoid being taken to the cells. By then I had met the people at the SRC and the Hands Off programme and I knew my rights. I told the policemen that I knew the law and that I was not going to bribe them. I said if they wanted to arrest me they must go ahead and arrest me. In fact, I walked ahead by myself and waited for them at the station! When they got there I said I have a right to phone my lawyer. When a lawyer from the SRC arrived we were told we were being fined \$5 each for loitering for the purposes of prostitution. We knew they couldn't prove it and we went to court. The case was in court for a year and at the end of it, the judge ruled that the police must pay us back each of our \$5. We had won. They came door-to-door to pay us back our \$5 each, can you imagine! What I wish is that the police would stop harassing us and that our communities know that sex work is work.

**“We are only offering a service:  
we are not stealing husbands.  
Actually, what pains me the most  
is that sex workers are being  
killed. I know six who have been  
killed. If I get killed, people will  
find out I was killed but will they  
know who killed me? Men can use  
our services for sex but they must  
not kills us.”**

**No sex without a condom**

If it wasn't for the Hands Off programme, I wouldn't still be working now. We used to think that money was the most important thing. Imagine a client asks us for sex without a condom and he will pay us \$50 for it. We couldn't say no to that. But the SRC taught us that our health is the most important thing. I also now know how to respond when people call me 'amawule'. I don't fight them anymore. If I wasn't a sex worker, I'd be a maid earning very little every month. Now I earn much more than that. I can dress like this. My children live with me here in town. They get the food they want. I can wake up in the morning and have eggs for breakfast! I can pay for my mother to come visit me. I can spend the days with my children which is good because I am even a grandmother now.

