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In Honor of the Young Women's Empowerment Project and Youth Speaking for Themselves

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - August 8, 2013 - The Native Youth Sexual Health Network (NYSHN) would like to honor and acknowledge our friends at the Young Women's Empowerment Project (YWEP) for their many years of amazing work! YWEP have truly been an inspiration and a driving force of youth leadership as well as peer role models to many of us for living a practice of reproductive justice, healing, harm reduction and empowerment.

[We support the self determination of YWEP in their decision to close its doors this year.](#) While we are saddened by this loss to community organizing we are also excited for what the future holds for YWEP staff and will continue to share in their vision. We hear and respect YWEP's decision, emphasizing that this was not driven by lack of funding as the organization is financially in good standing. Rather, this is part of resisting the not for profit industrial complex that defines and often limits what community organizing can look like.

YWEP goes forward with a legacy of 12 years of work, grounded in the strong belief that young people involved in the sex trade and street economies matter, deserve to be treated with dignity and respect, and should have a space at the table where decisions are being made that affect their lives.

NYSHN has always and will continue to support spaces where young people are met where they are at, without judgement or stigma, particularly as it relates to our bodies, sexualities and the decisions we make. Part of the process of colonization was, and still is, to regulate and control where certain people can live and 'maintain order' through policing and labeling certain communities as undesirable and not welcome. As an Indigenous youth organization we believe in the importance of supporting our communities right to make their own decisions about their lives and bodies, instead of the harmful imposed laws and policies created since colonization that decide for us what is and is not 'acceptable'.

We want to reiterate the statement released by YWEP calling for allyship and support in this

difficult and fully informed decision. We feel it is important to emphasize their words that:

“YWEP is staffed entirely by youth of color with life experience in the sex trade and street economy. The Anti-Trafficking movement changed laws that have made YWEP young people unsafe. We won’t let our youth become targets.”

NYSHN is committed to the creation and safety of spaces for young people free of persecution, discrimination and ongoing shame for who we are. We will be attending the final gathering and closing ceremony in Chicago [*“Metamorphosis: Honoring the Power of Youth in the Sex Trade and Street Economy”*](#) on August 10 and participate in documenting the legacy of YWEP, building sustainable relationships beyond organizational standing and encouraging movement forward.

It would be impossible to explain the scope of all of YWEP’s work, but we wanted to highlight a few key resources that will continue to live on:

Bad Encounter Line Report 2012 - Denied Help! How Youth in the Sex Trade and Street Economy are Turned Away from Systems Meant to Help Us and What we are Doing to Fight Back

<http://ywepchicago.files.wordpress.com/2011/06/bad-encounter-line-report-20121.pdf>

Street Youth Bill of Rights

<http://ywepchicago.files.wordpress.com/2011/07/bill-of-rights1.jpg>

Want to support YWEP? Find out more here!

<http://ywepchicago.files.wordpress.com/2013/06/what-ywep-needs-from-allies-and-talking-points.pdf>

Let’s continue this work by changing the stories about our communities from oppressive narratives of shame and negative statistics, to the true stories of young people who are leading the way for self determination and pride for who we are, what we have and continue to live through and what we will build together. Community organizing is ours to reclaim on our own terms, and there’s no better time to start than now!

Native Youth Sexual Health Network (NYSHN) works with Indigenous youth and communities across the United States and Canada to advocate for and build strong, comprehensive and culturally safe sexuality and reproductive health, rights and justice initiatives in their own communities.

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