

# Ethical brothel struggles to find staff

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The owner of Whangarei's new ethical brothel has hit out at Work and Income New Zealand for blocking her efforts to find would-be sex workers from the ranks of the unemployed.

Antonia Murphy opened [The Bach](#), in Whangarei, four months ago. But she said her attempts to fill vacancies amongst her staff were being hindered by a refusal from Winz - as well as TradeMe and local Facebook job boards - to allow her to advertise for staff with them.

She had been told by Winz that sex work was "unsuitable" for its job listings. But she disagreed, saying women should be free to make the choice for themselves.

And what did Winz deem suitable?

"A quick look at the Northland Winz job board answers that question: cleaning work, serving in restaurants, working at a call centre," said Murphy.

"These are entry level jobs, the vast majority of which pay within a few pennies of minimum wage. I am offering more than eleven times that pay rate."

Murphy paid up to \$180 an hour, offered a flexible working schedule and free childcare.

However, Ministry of Social Development associate national commissioner Annie Aranui said it was a long-standing policy to not list or refer job seekers to work in the sex industry.

"This policy was confirmed immediately following the passage of the Prostitution Reform Act in 2003."

But Murphy said it should at least be offered as a choice.

"Is it morally better to sell 40-plus hours a week of your time at a tedious job, to earn the same money you can make in three hours doing sex work?"

"I think that's a decision every woman can and should make for herself."

Murphy said other avenues had also proven difficult, as TradeMe and a number of local Facebook job boards had blocked her from advertising.

TradeMe head of Trust and Safety Jon Duffy said selling services of a sexual nature were not permitted.

"We've had a heap of people try to sell their virginity on the site over the years, but we've never allowed it. We also don't allow non-virgins to sell their services either, or job vacancies such as prostitutes."

Duffy said although prostitution was legal, allowing such jobs to be advertised was something the community didn't appreciate.

"Listings like this would attract a huge number of complaints."

Murphy said it was tough to find staff when she could not advertise widely.

"I'm trying to make a respectful, supportive environment for my workers and when I succeed, it is wonderful: the ladies make great money, they have a good time and they walk out of here feeling like a million bucks."

Murphy was frustrated others did not see her business in the same light.

Auckland University associate professor in the department of commercial law Alex Sims said weighing up the legality of prostitution against the ability to openly advertise was challenging.

"It is legal, but it is not something you want to be seen as pushing people into and I think people would take it as being pushed into it."

Director of Auckland University's board of gender studies Carisa Snowden said there was still a lot of stigma about the industry and most still saw the "sex" part of sex-work, but not the "work" part.

Snowden said the Prostitution Reform Act stated its purpose was to decriminalise prostitution, while not endorsing or morally sanctioning it.

"I think moral disapproval about sex work is still very much there in the media and government nearly 14 years post-passage."

Murphy, who had been given 30 days to get resource consent when she first opened, was still working through the necessary legalities with council.

- Herald on Sunday

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