Fine(r) China

An innovative magazine provides China’s sex workers with free sexual heath advice.

December 1, 2009 By James Wortman

In 2003, renowned AIDS activist Li Dan opened a school for AIDS orphans in China’s remote Henan province, where thousands of farmers contracted HIV in the 1990s through poorly regulated government-backed blood buying programs. However, instead of being celebrated for stepping up when the government wouldn’t, he was beaten up by local officials and forced to shut down the school.

“The local government was so enraged by what we were doing,” Dan says. “The existence of AIDS makes the government feel they will lose face.”

While HIV remains an issue the government has yet to confront fully or willfully, Dan’s resolve and desire to fight on behalf of the downtrodden have only gotten stronger. Through the Dongjen Center for Human Rights Education and Action, Dan publishes *Flower*, a magazine designed solely for sex workers. The magazine is distributed directly to sex workers every two months, providing HIV prevention and testing info, self-defense tips and even fashion advice.

“In China, discrimination and stigma drive sex work underground,” Dan explains. “With *Flower*, we want to make our readers feel that sex work is not dirty. Sex workers have rights.”

Dan adds that future issues will place a strong emphasis on empowerment by connecting readers with organizations and services to help them better navigate this often perilous industry.

Now *that’s* flower power.

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