

PEOPLE

JANET MOLLOY

IN COMPANY WITH CONSCIENCE

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CONTRIBUTOR/UBUD

More than 50 percent of Bali's sex workers are believed to be HIV positive.

This worries restaurateur and silver jewelry manufacturer, Janet Molloy. Her concerns are not based on morality, but on the health of babies born with HIV to mothers unaware they have the deadly disease.

"The numbers [of HIV infected sex workers] means that a guy going to a brothel in Bali has a one in two chance of taking HIV home to his wife. I have heard some say that this disease only applies to the bottom strata of society. But the bottom line is that HIV is not about bad people, not the social lower class, it's [about] any man who pays for sex without using a condom and putting his family at risk from that - it is not a class issue," Molloy says, who for the past 18 months has helped fund supplementary feeding, toys and clothes for babies born with HIV.

Funding is desperately needed she says, because hospitals simply don't have the budget to offer the added care needed for seriously ill children.

"HIV babies, when they are brought into hospital, are too ill too have HIV drugs. They need to be nursed to a point where they are healthy enough first, and this means supplementary feeding with hypoallergenic formula, which is really expensive. I learned that one doctor at Sanglah, Dr. Dewi and her nurses were taking money from their own pockets to subsidize this formula, but a lot of babies died."

Dr. Dewi's work really struck a cord in her, so with a friend she decided to do something to help.

What upsets Molloy most about these HIV babies and their mothers is that it could all be so easily prevented.

"Early last year, a couple of babies died because essentially we are closing the door after the horse has bolted; how much [money and ef-

fort] are we putting into saving these ill babies with HIV drugs instead of having mandatory blood testing for pregnant women so if she is HIV positive she can have a Caesarean birth. Babies born to HIV positive mothers by Caesarean almost never contract HIV; vaginally birthed babies are virtually guaranteed of infection," says Molloy, pointing out mandatory blood tests are standard for pregnant women in many countries around the world.

Shutting the door on a bolting horse can start even earlier, stresses Molloy, with the age-old disease prevention method of condoms. However, says Molloy, the greater percentage of men visiting sex workers refuse to use a condom, breaking not only their marriage vows on a trust level, but putting their wives and children at risk of a death sentence.

Molloy does not take a moral high ground on whether living as a sex worker is right or wrong, nor does she pass judgment on their clients, except when those clients refuse to wear condoms.

"How many people choose this life [a sex worker] - they are driven to it and they are powerless to insist on condoms. I feel great compassion for these girls forced to work as prostitutes with clients who refuse to use condoms. These girls are not in a bargaining position. The guy takes HIV home, his wife becomes pregnant and infected with HIV, the man dies of the disease and she is left with a seriously ill baby, is ill herself and finds she has no choice but to become a sex worker to feed and care for that baby," says Molloy of the potential for disaster so easily preventable.

And it is prevention that Molloy also funds with pamphlets and information dissemination. "Working with different organizations we have funded flyers and pamphlets

educating people on the symptoms of HIV and early treatment in babies and HIV, its transmission and prevention of transmission prevention ...but we need a lot more pamphlets."

The growth of the disease can be seen in one of Molloy's examples. "There was one guy who became infected with HIV. His wife had one child, a girl, she then had two more children.

"The mother, the later two children and the father were all HIV positive. The mother left her husband and the children. In a family of five, only one girl escaped the disease. The father could not cope with these seriously ill babies while very ill himself and had to give them up to an orphanage," says Molloy, stressing again that condoms and understanding of HIV spread would have protected this family.

In the same way Molloy seeks at least some solution to HIV spread, so does she also work on domestic violence prevention. In her businesses, Gemala Bali Silver and Havana (salsa restaurant), she sets a "zero tolerance" policy on domestic violence and sexual harassment.

"Why don't all companies do this? All it takes is for the boss to take a stand. In my case, I supplied information on the anti-domestic violence laws. I got many, many copies of a magazine that discussed this and distributed it widely. At that time I had factories in Java, Kerobokan, Batuan and here in Gianyar so it was widely distributed to all staff," says Molloy.

"I had been aware of the problem of domestic violence and sexual harassment since starting my business in Bali back in the early 1990s. There was one young woman being sexually harassed. When I asked about this, the boys said she was a *janda*, a widow or divorced woman. Her husband had kicked her out of home, so



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she was just considered fair game for any of the boys to touch or harass her. I fired the guy who had been harassing her and all the men realized they were not allowed to sexually harass anyone. The story of that dismissal became legend. This was in 1992 and the girl who was being harassed is still with me," says Molloy.

The instant dismissal policy also applies to domestic violence. "If I hear of anyone beating their partners - they are instantly dismissed," says Molloy, recognizing that you can't change the world, but you can change your own environment and raise awareness of injustice in people's daily lives.

She does not preach from an impersonal perspective - Molloy, now nearing 60 years - has done it tough. At 42, she found herself with two small babies in a foreign country, a philandering husband and barely enough money for her son's much

needed baby formula. Molloy's own experiences led her to assist the Bumi Sehat child-birthing clinic in Ubud. All her female staff have access to the clinic for their births, with Molloy's company picking up the bill.

Today Molloy has opened Havana, a restaurant devoted to her passion and joy, Salsa. She discovered dance at 55 years old and has been learning the Cuban dance style ever since.

"At Havana, I want people to experience that joy, that fun of dancing. All the staff dance salsa and it's a place women can come if they are traveling alone, feel safe and welcome, and have a dance. Dancing is so good for women as they get older. It helps prevent Alzheimer's because of the mind and body connection. And it's fun," says this woman who believes working for social justice is an obligation on us all and "a win-win" practice in business and pleasure.