

In Loving Memory of

*Shane A
Petzer*

October 5, 2021

*"Your presence we miss, your memories
we treasure, Loving you always,
Forgetting you never."*

Sisonke Family

Petzer a colourful philanthropist was renowned for his advocacy of sex work in South Africa

Shane Petzer, co-founder of the Sex Workers Education and Advocacy Taskforce (SWEAT), has died following a sudden heart attack on Tuesday October 2021.

Petzer was renowned for his advocacy of sex work in South Africa. Survived by his husband, children, family and friends, he is said to have been a colourful soul who will be sorely missed.

Petzer died of an unexpected heart attack at his Barrydale home, which he shared with his husband, Scott Har who he had known for 26 years, after feeling ill. Petzer was the chairperson of an NGO that worked with the youth, became chairperson of Barrydale's health committee and sat on the board of the Barrydale hospice.

National coordinator of Sisonke and founding member of Sisonke National Sex Worker Movement in South Africa, Kholi Buthelezi described the late Shane Petzer as a warrior.

"He established an organisation that advocated for the rights and dignity of sex workers at a time when it was taboo to even talk about. He went the extra mile and played a big role in the journey of decriminalising sex work. More organisations have sprouted from his efforts." She described his sudden death as a huge loss not only for Sisonke, but for the sex workers' advocacy movement as a whole. Buthelezi said that she grew up looking up to him and his accomplishments.

Friend to Petzer, Dr Gordon Isaacs said Petzer will be remembered as a legend of colour and light, and missed for his integrity, empathy and spontaneity.

Isaacs who is also a co-founder of SWEAT, said he became acquainted with Petzer during the 1983 AIDS pandemic when he worked as a professor of social work at UCT and director at the Triangle Project in the Aids Support and Education Trust. Petzer was registered as a social auxiliary worker.

“In 1995, Petzer told me that he had been working as a male sex worker to create an extra income for himself, to which I advised him to use his situation as an opportunity.” Isaacs said.

Petzer was later subsidised to attend the first international sex worker conference in Japan where he met international advocacy and human rights persons working for the decriminalisation of the sex work industry at international level. This inspired him to start the organisation in Cape Town.

SWEAT was founded in 1996 after Petzer became with acquainted Ilsa Pauw who had written her thesis on the violence against female sex workers in Cape Town. Together with Pauw, Isaacs and a group of other people, SWEAT began its fight for the protection of sex workers. “Since then Petzer became an international powerhouse, actively involved in the international and national profile of civil rights, social justice and decriminilisation of sex work industry. As a man having lived healthily with HIV for 20 years, he also advocated for the universal treatment of people living with HIV.”

