

CLICK TO CONNECT

The woman selling “COMMERCIAL companionship”

A New Zealand website founded by a 63-year-old Dunedin woman provides companionship and intimacy for men and women, at a cost arranged between participants. Is it regarded as a useful service? **Nicola Russell** reports.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SHARRON BENNETT HAIR & MAKE-UP BY KATY PARSONS

I HEAR THE SAME STORIES repeatedly,” says Kate*, 63, an attractive and smartly dressed entrepreneur, mother, and founder of the website privatearrangements.co.nz – a “mature personals” service where male members pay female members for their companionship and, in many cases, sex.

In a café in Dunedin, Kate is explaining why she was inspired to start the website.

“Most dating sites make people miserable because women don’t understand men and men don’t understand women,” she begins. “Women want commitment. And there is an expectation from women that when there is intimacy, there will be a relationship. For a man, that is not

necessarily what he is thinking at all.”

Her site, she says, provides a solution. Because money is changing hands, Kate believes her women feel respected and her men free of obligation. “The men are paying for their freedom.”

But, she says, people join her site for more than just the physical act – they want to make other “arrangements” with people like them.

“The authentic connections are what make Private Arrangements unique. Some people go tramping together, swap books or share writing. The arrangement they make is up to them.”

As an ex-sex worker, working on and off since she was 28, Kate is well aware of the stigma that can be associated with the concept of prostitution. She prefers to describe what is happening on the site as “commercial companionship” or

“commercial intimacy” because “the sex is usually combined with other activities, as it is in the day-to-day lives of people.”

There are now 426 men on the site and 56 women (the site is aimed at heterosexual adults). Seventeen of those women offer companionship only. Women always have photos on their online profile, men can choose. Some members offer “gigs” – best described, perhaps, as a “package deal”.

“They can be tours, games, outings, topless housework and so on. Two of the men offer a ‘gig’ – one hosts trips over the Dunstan trails, stopping off at wineries, and the other a day out in Wanaka touring in his convertible classic car and dining at the Cardrona Valley Hotel,” explains Kate.

The standard of members on the site is high, she says, because she personally >

The site offers more than just sex, says Kate. People join for other reasons too, such as shared interests.





meets each man before he joins. This, she says, is not a vetting procedure, but rather a “getting to know you” meeting. “There is no police checking, and no contract, but I know when I meet someone if he is a nice person.”

Accompanying Kate today are four of her members – Mark, Nina, Bob and Edie*. All four tell me their “arrangements” are always accompanied by sex and that the details are negotiated over email messaging – each knows before they meet another member whether sex is included in the fee.

Mark met Kate for his introductory chat when he started looking for intimacy outside his partnership with a woman who had suffered post-natal depression.

“We had wonderful sex pre-children and when the children were young, but it tapered right off to nothing, and once the medication started it was history,” he says.

Mark visited brothels, but found that unfulfilling. “It was so businesslike – not comforting, and so disappointing.”

Private Arrangements, he says, gave him a more “normal” experience. “The site has women of about my age – people with life experience.”

Bob, a married man in his late 70s, is a real gentleman – polite and carefully spoken. Because he has been with his wife “for over half my life” it was essential Bob felt comfortable with the women he meets with. “What I find most enjoyable is the laughter – laughing together, being able to laugh at myself.”

Bob sees three women and has such affection for each of them that he has even told his daughter about them – partly so that if anything were to happen to him, they would be notified.

“I would hate the ladies to think I had just written them off.”

Kate is sympathetic to men in their twilight years and the isolation they can feel. “Men work hard, raise their families and suddenly their wives don’t want to know them any more. They are in another room because they snore and 10 to 15 years pass, while they live a life of celibacy. They want to keep their family together but inside something is lacking and they are miserable.”

Her site, she says, gives them another option. It’s completely anonymous, in that upon signing up, members agree they will never discuss what arrangements they have with others – breaking the rules can result in deletion. And the \$500 joining

fee also weeds out those who are not serious about Private Arrangements.

Edie, a hospitality worker in her 60s, says without that anonymity she could never have joined. If her children found out, she believes it would ruin her family relationships. After a long marriage and two long-term partnerships she says she had never considered anything other than a monogamous relationship and turned her nose up at the concept of Private Arrangements when she first came across it in a newspaper advertisement. But she later questioned that attitude and dived in.

“It’s not easy for women of my age to meet genuine men who don’t have a whole lot of baggage. It enables me to meet very high calibre gentlemen whom I’d not normally meet on a one-to-one basis. I now feel I’m being treated respectfully and generously and I don’t feel alone any more. The experience has increased my self-confidence and self-worth.”

WHAT EACH WOMAN charges is up to her, but Mark says most women cost \$100 to \$150 an hour. The difference, he says, between paying members on the site and paying a prostitute in a brothel is there is more spontaneity. “If you ‘click’ with her and you are having a whole lot of fun, neither party is going to be clock-watching. Sometimes there is an overnight date, and that is great because you can just act like a normal couple. You yearn for that.”

Whether people choose to offer sex or just simple companionship is their choice, says Kate. “They can come to me for advice, ask me about a person and, if they have a concern, complain about a member, but other than that it’s up to them to create their own little business. I don’t know what they are doing.

“It’s like being Alice in Wonderland – you can hop down the rabbit hole into a new world where there are no social barriers. A lot of the women on the site can’t believe the change that is happening in their lives.”

*All names have been changed.

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BOB IS A WELL-EDUCATED MAN in his late 70s with a wife, children and a grandchild. He has had a long marriage and a successful career.

He was introduced to the site after witnessing two members having their photo taken in a park about six months ago.

“It is intriguing that a small random event can cause such a dramatic change in one’s life. I had some time to fill in before taking a friend to a meeting and was sitting on my favourite warm rock in the sunshine. That day there was activity – two women involved in a photography session. Being a gentleman, I asked if they would they like me to move. “No, no – would you mind being included?” Who could refuse?

I asked for a copy of the photo and the next day an email from Kate, the photographer, arrived suggesting I get a more private email address, and in due course the pictures came through with a message: ‘You may be interested in this website.’ It must have looked like I was walking around waving a banner, because things had been a bit of a desert in the household for the previous five or six years. My wife had been unwell and prior to that she had lost interest in sex.

I had looked at dating sites in the past, but never subscribed because everyone wanted romance, which I did not. I am staying where I am. The family needs me and I have no intention of abrogating that responsibility.

For me it is the mental or the cerebral stimulation as much as the physical that

I desire. I now meet with three delightful ladies. With one, I play opera while we are together. Sometimes it has a strange effect when I hear the music elsewhere!

Of the three I see, one is in her early 60s, the other two are in their early 50s. That is something about which I do have moral scruples. I would never be with a young woman. I could never be with someone who is the same age as my daughter and anything younger is abhorrent – the cut-off for me is 45.

The age difference has not been a problem – I do keep myself fit and I am a bit careful with what I eat. On a personal note, as an older man, sometimes we may just end up lying there together and not engaging in any sexual activity, that's just the way it is. You get to know each other and become comfortable with each other.

I exercise regularly and in summer I do so in the mornings and so I can make an arrangement and no one is surprised if I am out for two or three hours.

I had been feeling sexually frustrated for several years and I am sure I am a much nicer person now. Quite often I am snapped at for things and I used to snap back, then we would end up in an argument. Now I let it wash over me.

I had never strayed from my marriage before; I have considered the moral issues of what I do and I have spoken to two of the ladies that I meet with about them. One discusses the morals of what she is doing with me too and the other one tells me not to be so philosophical and just enjoy things.

I have told my daughter – she doesn't know that I pay but she does know that I see other women through a site. She was a bit shocked initially but when I told her the age of the women I was seeing she was much relieved.

She knows it has not always been easy for me as a husband and she is totally reliable.” ■

f TALK TO US Is it ever OK to have sex outside a marriage or long-term relationship? Tell us at www.facebook.com/awwmagazine.

“I’m guarded. I don’t want to hurt anyone – her, me, our families. If you fell madly in love, you would have to figure out how you were going to handle it. But you don’t let it get to that stage.”



MARK IS IN HIS 60s and works in business administration in the South Island. He has been with his partner for over

20 years and is a father of two. Their sexual relationship ended when his partner suffered depression, following the birth of one of their children.

He had tried many avenues to deal with his sexual needs, read multiple books on the subject and had been to couple counselling, before joining Private Arrangements.

“I have thought about discussing being on the site with my partner, but it is not going to help. She is in a better place now in terms of her illness but there are other problems and I don't want to exacerbate what could be an improving situation.

I don't feel guilty and I don't feel I am cheating because I am not cheating her out of anything – if she wanted to have sex tonight I'd be there and ready to go.

Money changing hands is what makes it what it is – if it wasn't, it would change the complexion of the site completely, and I feel it would be cheating. It wouldn't be right.

It's not a panacea for all that you want, though. There have been one or two [negative encounters] – someone with really bad teeth and breath for example – but that's mainly because she was not well off, poor thing.

Women don't always understand that if you are married to someone and you love them, the fact that her boobs have drooped or her tummy has got a big roll is irrelevant – it is still lovely having sex.

There are women on the site who don't have the best body shape, but they are great – they are bright and bubbly, they have enthusiasm and they love to have sex.

Generally, if you are getting along well with someone you have met on the site, it feels very normal, like it would be if you were with your partner. That is the big attraction for me. I don't want to go to young girls in a brothel. I don't want someone who has sex for a job.

To be honest, the first time was a bit disappointing, because every man has these fantasies that are, of course, complete nonsense when you are dealing with normal people.

There are women on the site that I will go back and visit again and again. There is one woman who has the loveliest brown eyes – they make me melt – and she is so lovely. I've seen her about three or four times in the last 18 months.

I'm guarded. I don't want to hurt anyone – her, me, our families. If you fell madly in love, you would have to figure out how you were going to handle it. But you don't let it get to that stage.

This is about pleasure and enjoying each other's company as well – I've been out to dinner with ladies, been to watch sport, all sorts of things.

Men are hard-wired – we love to look at women's breasts and we love to look around the room and dream we are going to be with that gorgeous woman over there. We suppress it, so we are not being an absolute goon in public. But it IS there, and it is no good kidding ourselves otherwise.”