



## 'Sex in the City'

The Melbourne City Council has recently commissioned RhED to undertake a research project about young people and their health and sexual practices. The 'Sex in the City' Project has been initiated in response to the need to develop a better understanding of street sex work in the CBD. Evidence from a variety of sources suggests that some young people, who are mainly homeless, with limited financial resources and in poor health, are engaging in sexual activity in exchange for money or other resources. Whilst young people are engaging in sex work within the CBD, research undertaken as background for the 'Sex in the City' Project suggests that it is generally covert. It is also difficult to quantify to what extent it is occurring as most services do not request specific information about sex work activity.

Research in the City of Port Phillip indicated that young people engaging in street sex work often do so because poor health, homelessness and age factors make them ineligible for safer forms of sex work in brothels or in the escort industry. Many have a range of issues including unemployment and drug and/or alcohol problems and most experience multiple barriers to participation in the life of the community. In addition, sex workers are particularly vulnerable to abuse and physical assault, including sexual assault.

The purpose of the 'Sex in the City' Project is to gather accurate, current information on street sex work in the CBD as well as to engage with young people and service providers in the development of policies and practices that target this group. In this way the Project aims to build the capacity of the service system to respond to issues specific to young people engaging in sex work. The overall goal of the 'Sex in the City' Project is the minimisation of harm associated with street sex work for young people.

The first stage of the 'Sex in the City' Project has seen over 50 young people surveyed via assertive outreach in the CBD by experienced RhED staff. Based on the research findings, the next stage of the Project will be the development of a training package for agencies currently providing services to young people in the CBD. Recommendations will also be developed for policies and procedures within specified services for responding to issues related to young people's street sex work.