

## Mardi visits Durbar, Sex Worker Org in Kolkata, India

In November 2012, I was fortunate enough to be welcomed to visit DMSC, the Sex Worker Organisation in Kolkata, India. DMSC is the collectivisation of 65,000 sex workers which functions as an exclusive forum of female, male and trans\* sex workers in West Bengal.

We were welcomed by the organisation founder Dr Smarajit Jana who gave an overview of the organisation. I shared some of RhED's resources with him and we spoke about the Sex Work Act 1994 in Victoria. He also introduced us to some members of the DMSC Committee of Management.

Accompanied by sex workers, a guide/interpreter and some members of the Committee of Management, we went to one of the largest sex worker districts in Asia, Sonagachi. There we met with both street sex workers and brothel workers. We visited STI and HIV clinics and met peer sex worker educators on outreach. We drank lots of Chai, swapped experiences, shared knowledge and asked lots of questions of each other. The peer educators each have 70 sex workers that they provide outreach to between the hours of 10am–2pm most days of the week. The peer

educators are volunteering and are not remunerated for this role.

DMSC also supports the children of sex workers. We were treated to an inspired traditional Indian dance by some of the children of a dance troupe.

The generosity of everyone who greeted us was amazing. It was heartening to hear the work that the sex workers had achieved. They work together to advocate and create change. They also support each other through the establishment of their own credit co-operation and social enterprises including schools, sex-worker run child care and other projects.

Their important work involves strategies and responses to prevent and respond to trafficking, to educate people against societal stigma, to lobby government for improved working conditions and rights for workers in legislation. They recently facilitated the Sex Worker Freedom Festival 2012. Hopefully they will be joining us in Melbourne for the International AIDS Conference in 2014.



--- *Mardi Kennedy* ---

