

SHARED SOLUTIONS: SAFE SPACES FOR SEX WORKERS



Top: Andrew and Tash prepare to unfurl banners at 10 Inkerman St
Photo: Robert Lewis

Top: RhED building adorned with red and white 2x4m banners
Photo: Robert Lewis

Many of our readers will already be aware of the recent public attention toward street sex work issues in St Kilda. The ongoing debate reignited through the media when the Port Phillip Action Group (PPAG) announced a 'Residents' Street Walk Against Street Prostitution & Drugs In St Kilda' on Sunday February 25th to protest to Local Member John Thwaites, State Government and Port Phillip Council that they "do not feel safe and want prostitution (& related drug activity) removed from Port Phillip streets into a designated non-residential area" (sic).

RhED organised a counter action, which included immediate support and advice to street sex workers about safety and non-confrontational strategies for use on the day of the rally. We decided to preempt the resident action with a public ceremony showing our commitment to the health, safety and rights of street sex workers. A press release was issued inviting media, agencies and individuals to the event at 10 Inkerman Street St Kilda. On Friday February 23, 2001 at 12.30pm, to the cheers of the gathered

crowd, we unfurled from the roof two red banners with the slogans SHARED SOLUTIONS and SAFE SPACES FOR SEX WORKERS. Kathy Wilson, Chief Executive Officer of Inner South Community Health Service gave a rousing speech on behalf of our organisation highlighting the promotion of constructive dialogue within the community and respect for diversity, whilst continuing a proactive approach to the provision of public health issues.

The Program Manager Karen Sait acknowledged the role that public concern and media had played in prompting state government attention resulting in a meeting between key stakeholders and the

real possibility of legislative reform. Following this initial meeting, Karen reported that "the community consultative forum with the Attorney General, Rob Hulls, was positive with about 25 people present from key agencies, local government, police, residents and traders. From this meeting a Ministerial Advisory Group will be established with the task of establishing short and long term strategies regarding the street sex industry. It will be a bipartisan group with representation from Liberal and National parties and Independents. This is crucial for any and all legislative changes."

RhED and street sex worker representatives are invited to be part of the Advisory Group. The Attorney General has indicated the areas "on the table" for discussion and action include:

- decriminalisation of street sex work
- zoned areas
- "safe houses" where workers could take clients (similar to NSW)

RhED also tabled a proposal to the Attorney General focusing on an industry/resident liaison and research project which will feed into the Advisory process.

Due to the enormous amount of media coverage which transpired during this period, we are unable to document it all here, however interested parties are welcome to access material that we have archived at 10 Inkerman Street. Please feel free to contact Karen at RhED to feedback ideas and/or suggestions about making street sex work a viable and safe part of the industry.



Photos: Di Surgey