

Over the past year RhED has increasingly recognized and experienced the value in partnerships with other specialist service providers. Being aware that sex work occurs in all sorts of places, we have been involved in two pilot projects with two other key service agencies providing diverse services with a view to increasing awareness of and access to a range of health services for sex workers in their local community. As a statewide program RhED has collaborated with Women's Health in the North (WHIN) and South Eastern Alcohol and Drug Services (SEADS) – drug safety service, to develop each agency's capacity to provide their services to those working in the sex industry – in a range of environments.

The WHIN project

This project is a partnership with Women's Health in the North (WHIN) and RhED. WHIN is the regional women's health service for the northern metropolitan region of Melbourne. The goal of the project is to enhance the health, welfare, safety and wellbeing of women working in brothels located in Melbourne's north through the delivery of an innovative Brothel Outreach Program that combines the expertise and experiences of RhED and WHIN.

The Outreach Program includes specific health, welfare and safety information and advice pertaining to sex work, as well as women's broader health and well-being information and advice.

It was felt that the Outreach Program would need to be particularly responsive to the health, welfare and safety needs of CALD women who may work in brothels located in Melbourne's north. Since RhED has a dedicated CALD Project Worker, both organisations agreed that her participation in the Outreach Program was vital.

One of the project success indicators will be that the partnership between RhED and WHIN is effective in reaching women who might otherwise not have access to information and advice on their health, safety, welfare and wellbeing. We are now at a stage where the program is winding up in that the outreach component is drawing to a close.

Jules and Sandra from RhED and Sue from WHIN will then get together with the management group to complete an evaluation of the project. News of the findings from the project will be available in the next edition.

The RhED/SEADS project – 'The Dandenong Experience'

Our collective experience, anecdotal information and more recently media coverage suggested to us that there are currently regular and casual street sex workers operating in the Dandenong area.

Our intention for the project was to explore opportunities for RhED workers to work with SEADS – drug safety outreach workers in the Dandenong area to determine the extent of unmet needs both for street sex workers and service staff and further develop opportunities for intervention. Each agency was in agreement with the aim to develop short term interventions which identified facts, clarified issues, assisted in modifying practices and beliefs and to achieve resolution of any day to day concerns.

The project operation consisted of a series of ten street outreach sessions with designated RhED and SEADS outreach workers working together in the local Dandenong area. A male health and education support worker from RhED also conducted an outreach session to examine the needs of male sex workers operating as street based workers in the area, looking at environmental and individual needs for this group.

An additional aim was the promotion of the Southern Health Primary Health Care facility in Foster Street in Dandenong. This facility includes a reproductive health clinic which sex workers are encouraged to access. Rosie, the women's health nurse from the primary health facility has engaged with the RhED outreach workers to visit brothels in the Dandenong area with the aim to improve access for sex workers to health facilities.

The project period, twelve months in total that commenced in October 2002 will provide information related to the demographics of street sex workers, patterns, variations and practices, which occur within the area. The RhED team is comprised of Jan and Jules as the alternating outreach workers, the SEADS team is comprised of Troy, Robyn, and Jo as alternating outreach workers and Sharon and Colin backed up the project from a management perspective. Andrew and Greg from RhED conducted an outreach session with Wayne from SEADS specifically looking at male sex work patterns. The findings of all of these activities and experiences will be available in the final report. 