

# STREET WALKING BLUES

SEX WORK,  
ST KILDA  
AND THE STREET

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THE SALVATION ARMY  
*crisis services*

*Street Walking Blues: Sex Work, St Kilda and the Street*

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Cover Image: Grey Street, December 2002: Photographer: Matthias Heng.

# A murdered prostitute, tossed in a ditch. But who was Kelly Hodge?



Kelly Hodge, the appealing little girl her family knew and loved. TOP RIGHT: The unforgiving police mug shot.

Those who loved her remember not a dull-eyed drug addict, but a bright-eyed, rather sad little girl. Ian Munro goes looking for the girl left in the gutter.



To know Kelly Hodge you must set aside the harsh and easy labels that accompanied her at the end. You must search beyond the dark, shadowy parts of her life.

Set aside the dull-eyed police mug shot, take in, instead, the first school portrait of a charmingly nervous little girl bracing herself for the unknown.

It is this that better captures her, and it is this that her family chose to place on her coffin this week. It is this that hints at the quiet, sensitive young woman they knew.

Not long after that photograph was taken, six months before Kelly Hodge's sixth birthday, her mother, Anita, died of pneumonia. It seems to those who knew her that Kelly was forever cloaked in the sadness of that time.

"I don't think it's anything you ever really get over," her elder sister, Stacey, said this week. "She was always sad. I told her earlier this year that she had to let it go a little bit. I think Kelly felt too much, and spent too much time looking back."

Kelly Hodge, 26, was last seen by her grandmother on August 18 as she left their Coburg home for work in St Kilda's street sex precincts. Her body was found, naked and wrapped in a blanket, at Beveridge eight days later.

Her clothes, handbag and

mobile phone were missing. Police are looking for a blue denim shoulder bag with handwriting in black or navy Texta, which Kelly used while working the corner of Grey and Gurner streets.

She died of head injuries, but it is unclear just when she was killed.

"We really don't know how long she has been dead," Detective Senior Constable Andrew Kilpatrick said yesterday.

"It could have been as late as the last time she was seen on the 18th, or closer to the 26th."

She had been a sex worker for two to three years. A welfare worker said Kelly had reappeared on the street about a month before her disappearance.

Her sister said she had only recently failed to beat her heroin addiction through a methadone program.

"When she was on the methadone the last time, Kelly made definite plans for her life," she said. "I noticed every time has lasted longer than the one previous. Eventually she would have overcome all of this."

"She would have gone back to school and that just makes it worse, knowing not only has someone taken her life, but they have taken the rest of the family's hopes for her."

"It's a loss of possibility. We don't know what she would have

done. It would not have been beyond Kelly, having sorted out her own life, to have gone and helped other people in the same situation down the track."

Kelly Hodge is the fifth St Kilda street sex worker to have been murdered since the early 1990s, yet her murder has received scant media attention.

Stacey worries that the public will think Kelly put herself in harm's way, that she somehow "had it coming."

"Nobody deserves this," Stacey said. "And I don't know if my family will ever get over this."

**Nobody deserves this, I don't know if my family will ever get over this.** STACEY, Kelly's sister

"The other things about her, the things that made her special, her respect for people and her love of animals, were still there."

Those who knew her in St Kilda described Kelly Hodge as sad and withdrawn, a private person who found herself in that scene, but not truly of it.

She formed few friendships there, and was insistent on keeping what went on in St Kilda separate from the rest of her life.

She worked as safely as circumstances allowed, a welfare

CONTINUED NEWS 4

This project is dedicated to the memory of Kelly Hodge whose life was the source of its inspiration.

Article source:

'A murdered prostitute tossed in a ditch. But who was Kelly Hodge?'  
by Ian Munro The Age, 6 September 2003

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

A history of street-based sex work in St Kilda	1
Local Community Responses	13
The Attorney-General's Street Prostitution Advisory Group	17
Street-based sex work: An introduction to past research	22
I had an alright childhood	32
I was a good student	41
We went out night clubbing and stuff	51
All that money in your hand just for doing that	63
He didn't put a gun to my head and stick it in my arm	73
A circle of friends	74
Family	77
Boyfriend	79
I wouldn't wish it upon my worst enemy ... a heroin addiction	80
I thought this would be more of an appropriate way to support myself	87
Going down the street	100
I had a pretty bad experience	111
Rape	112
Violence and intimidation	115
Narrow misses	117
Rip offs	119
I was more worried about cops	122
You can't move an institution	123
The street's absolutely crap	126
Sexual health	132
Physical health	135
Mental Health	135
I lost trust in guys, but not all guys	138
I've looked at marine biology	142
I should be with my family ... reality struck me basically	154
The realisation	155
Building a new life	164
Conclusion	174
Epilogue	178
References	180



A HISTORY OF  
STREET-BASED  
SEX WORK IN  
ST KILDA



STREETWALKING BLUES

- SEX WORK, ST KILDA AND THE STREET

A HISTORY OF STREET-BASED SEX WORK IN ST KILDA

## A HISTORY OF STREET-BASED SEX WORK IN ST KILDA

Prostitution, or payment for sexual activity, is, to borrow a phrase, one of the oldest professions in Australia. Certainly it has been a profession in much demand since European settlement, a consequence of the 'frustrations' of a male population that outnumbered women by a ratio of six to one (Frances 1994). Feminist historians reflect on a scenario in which women were 'compelled into prostitution by State policy and structural factors rather than personal vices' (Frances 1994: 32). Boyle et al. (1997) refer to the 'enforced whoredom' of women during this period of Australian history.

If anything is indicative of the driving force behind prostitution, it is the fact that demand remains at high levels even when gender imbalance is no longer an issue. Although gender ratios were relatively even in Australian towns by the late nineteenth century, demand for prostitutes remained high. Frances (1994: 36-37) suggests that the high demand for commercial sexual activity was a consequence of the double standards that characterised Victorian morality. This moral code included the expectation that men would defer marriage until able to provide financial security for their future wife. However, willingness to defer marriage did not extend to a willingness to suppress 'irrepressible' and 'natural' sexual urges. In contrast, 'respectable' women would face condemnation were they to engage in premarital sex. It would certainly spoil any prospect of their future marriage. Consequently, men sought to satisfy their urges by visiting prostitutes who, given their profession, were seen to be immoral or 'fallen' women. Despite the widespread practice, engaging with these immoral women was far from acceptable to many members of the colonies. In 1873, the pamphlet *Vice and its Victims in Sydney* drew attention to the corrupting influence of prostitutes on the virtue of men. Nothing was said about the weakness of men who were apparently compelled to engage in sexual activity simply because prostitutes could be 'seen':

The youth and manhood of Sydney are being rapidly corrupted and destroyed. There is a class of girls and young women here – hopeless specimens of whom may be seen airing themselves in the Domain and Gardens ... sapping the foundations of the State, and urging youth to ruin and infamy (in Winter 1976: 30).

The transition from colonial (or convict) Australia to a 'free' society in the late nineteenth century saw significant changes in political and legislative responses to prostitution. While soliciting by convict women was tolerated as a reflection of their 'working class' immorality, the move towards a 'respectable' family oriented society at the turn of the century prompted legislative action to 'clean up the streets' (Frances 1994). Originally this took the form of vagrancy laws such as the *Victorian Act for the Prevention of Vagrancy and Other Offences* (1852). Later laws drew upon health concerns (i.e. the need to contain sexually transmissible disease). The *Public Health Conservation Act* (1878), for example, empowered police to compel prostitutes to undergo medical examinations (Advisory Council 2002). In 1891, the *Police Offences Amendment*



*Act* became the first piece of legislation to contain a soliciting offence in Victoria by prohibiting prostitutes from importuning 'any person passing in any public street, thoroughfare or place' (Advisory Council 2002: 26).

Brothels in Victoria were initially located in central Melbourne within the boundaries of La Trobe, Spring, Lonsdale and Exhibition Streets. Prostitution became particularly visible during the 'boom decade' of the 1880s, when women could be seen soliciting for trade in the streets (McConville 1980). In 1898, the Chief Commissioner of Police was responsible for a crackdown that saw the closure of many establishments. Thereafter, brothels were confined to the city's north-east, primarily in Little Lonsdale Street and adjoining lanes (Winter 1976). In the same year that the pamphlet *Vice and its Victims in Sydney* was circulating, a report of similar tone was presented to the Victorian Parliament. This report was dismissive of the suggestion that women may have been driven to prostitution as a consequence of economic necessity:

It is not credible, nor even possible that women here are driven to vice by poverty, or from want of employment or from insufficient wages ... The demand for female servants of all classes at very high wages is incessant, and there is a dearth of female labour in every department of manufacturing industry.

Instead, it argued that women became prostitutes to fulfil their own immoral desires:

It is beyond doubt that by far the larger number of fallen women in Victoria have become so because of their own deliberate choice, either from a love of idleness and luxurious habits, or from an inherent propensity to vice (Blair 1873 in McConville 1980: 86-7).

Interestingly, despite criticism at the level of the Victorian Parliament, police were willing to turn a blind eye to the activities of prostitutes in the Melbourne's north-east, as long as it did not occur 'in localities inhabited by respectable people' (McConville 1980: 89). In 1884, a demand from city residents for police action against prostitution was met by the response that those demanding action should have known the character of the area before they chose to move there.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, those soliciting for trade in 'respectable' areas of Melbourne were very soon subject to police attention. In 1886, for example, a number of prostitutes sought to conduct business in Acland Street, St Kilda. Police took swift action, moving them out of the area (McConville 1980). At this time, St Kilda had been known for some years as a prosperous and fashionable suburb, populated by residents from the well-to-do or 'respectable' classes.

A number of developments in the late 19th century, however, were to have a significant impact upon St Kilda's identity as a 'respectable' and exclusive suburb. Primary among these developments was the establishment of tramlines connecting central Melbourne to St. Kilda in 1888. These provided the means by which large numbers of urban pleasure seekers could access the parklands and beachside reserves in St Kilda, a development

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<sup>1</sup> This continues to be an argument raised by long-term residents of St Kilda when relative newcomers bemoan the presence of sex workers in residential streets.

seen as lowering the 'tone' of the suburb and driving many of the more prosperous residents to re-locate to nearby South Yarra and Toorak. Further, the depression of the 1890s led to many large St Kilda mansions being sold and converted into cheap apartments and / or boarding house accommodation. The opening of entertainment venues, including Luna Park (in 1912) and the Palais de Danse (in 1913) brought the nightlife to St Kilda's entertainment precinct as well as increasing the patronage of the 'working classes' who were seen to be responsible for subsequent increase in 'immoral' activity. As Longmire (1989) notes in her history of St Kilda:

The existence of vandalism, sly grog dealing, drug peddling and prostitution confirmed the prejudices of some who thought the social death-knell for St Kilda had sounded in the late 1880s when cable cars made the city accessible to all.

By 1930, prostitution was still not technically illegal in Victoria. Although 'soliciting' was illegal, the offence could only be proven if the recipient of the prostitute's solicitations was willing to give evidence – an unlikely occurrence. In 1932, however, Melbourne City Council empowered police to suppress disorderly houses for 'immoral purposes' within its boundaries. The spread of industry and business throughout Melbourne had provided the impetus to 'clean up' the 'back slums' of north-east Melbourne (Winter 1976). The proclivities of the 'working classes' were no longer tolerated within the Melbourne CBD, a stance that forced prostitution-related activity into adjoining suburbs, including St Kilda where the entertainment and recreational facilities attracted individuals with money to spend (Longmire 1989). The decision by the City of South Melbourne to prohibit soliciting in 1935 was responsible for further increasing the number of prostitutes in St Kilda. Recognising the need for action, St Kilda Council passed By-law 117 in 1937. This made brothel keeping an offence and contained provisions prohibiting prostitutes from soliciting in public. However, reflecting the difficulties that hinder the effective enforcement of such measures, only four charges were laid in the first year of By-Law 117 and St Kilda was soon widely known as a locale in which prostitutes could be seen soliciting for trade (Longmire 1989). Nonetheless, it was not until the outbreak of World War Two and the establishment of army barracks in nearby Albert Park that street prostitution became visibly widespread throughout St Kilda (Bennett 1991).

During the war years, the thousands of Australian and US servicemen who were the temporary occupants of these barracks sought out 'female company' in St Kilda. A 1944 police report noted that Fitzroy Street, St Kilda had become:

... the centre of activity for street prostitutes. The gardens area between the bowling green and St Kilda Rd, and that portion of Albert Park Reserve used as a playing area for the school, has been in constant use by these women for the purpose of intercourse with their clients ... the unlighted strip of parkland adjacent to the street provides a ready made brothel for women who find it impossible to obtain rooms (in Longmire 1989: 126).

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An indication of the extent to which servicemen were frequenting the area for the purpose of brief sexual encounters was the pragmatism of the US military, which, fearing the potential spread of venereal disease among its troops, made a decision to establish a 'prophylactic station' in the vicinity of Luna Park in 1942. Demand kept the facility operational until July 1946 (Longmire 1989). Although the legacy of Victorian morality was still lingering within the upper-ranks of the Australian military, Australian authorities took over the administration of the station in 1943. This was a reflection of the relative tolerance of prostitution during the war years and an indication of a continuing belief in the need to accommodate the 'natural' urges of disproportionately large numbers of single men by allowing their access to 'sinful' women (Boyle et al. 1997). Rather than a moral concern, commercial sex 'activity' between servicemen and prostitutes was seen as a health threat (*to the male clients*). The double standards are particularly obvious when one considers the attempts to suppress prostitution prior to the population of the Albert Park barracks. In 1940, for example, the St Kilda Council had acted to replace By-law 117 with By-law 128, thereby increasing penalties for loitering, soliciting and accosting for the purposes of prostitution. There were also amendments to the *Victorian Police Offences Act* to 'provide police with the necessary means of tackling the problem and of making residential districts in the metropolitan area safe for women and children' (Advisory Council 2002).

The double standards of Victorian morality were again on display at a 1943 National Health Conference held to address the spread of venereal disease. Underscoring the notion that 'immoral' women were the cause of prostitution, the blame for the increasing incidence of venereal disease was placed squarely on women. Reporting on the conference, *The Argus* gave support to calls for:

... the restriction of the sale of liquor to women, particularly young girls [and] stricter control by public authorities of laxity of conduct, especially by young women in public places ('Combating VD and Tuberculosis' *The Argus*, 16 June 1943: 7).

These views represent a continuation of the failure to appreciate the obvious – that demand is the driving force behind commercial sex activity. A letter of concern sent to the Victorian Parliament by members of the St Kilda Churches Citizens League and the St Kilda City Council reiterates this point and, again, suggests that Australia's fine young men are likely to go weak at the knees and abandon all common sense when they lay eyes on a prostitute:

The number of women who use those places in pursuit of their immoral business is increasing, and the presence of soldiers during the week-ends seems to have intensified the evil. Those fine young men should not be allowed to take the risk of becoming infected by disease ... (Victorian Parliamentary Debates 13 November 1940: 1586).

The visible increase in prostitution (as well as gambling and public drunkenness) throughout the war years furthered the ongoing exodus of 'decent' and 'respectable' members of society from St Kilda (Longmire 1989). On the other hand, its reputation as a place of notoriety where rules were broken led to a post-war influx of 'non-conformists', eager to live in a tolerant environment where their behaviour would not necessarily be subject to the condemnation of others. 'Sly-grog' was sold from several St Kilda cafes in the early 1950s and members of Melbourne's underworld, living on the profits of black-market wartime activities, now called St Kilda home (Longmire 1989). Accordingly, St Kilda never did manage to fit the conservative image of 1950s Australia as a land of white picket fences and family respectability. Indeed, while prostitution *did* decline overall in the post-war years as soldiers returned home, there was an **increase in street prostitution** as the diminishing number of potential customers led to more open attempts to solicit trade (Advisory Council 2002).

The stark contrast between St Kilda and the then dominant ideals of conformity and family were partially responsible for St Kilda Council's discreet approach to prostitution. It was thought that a concerted campaign to drive prostitution from the area would invite unwelcome publicity at a time when, as Longmire notes, 'Prostitution was an abhorrent subject [and] decent family life was so important' (1989, 185). Interestingly, the public did not seem greatly upset by this 'softly, softly' approach. Frank Power, an honorary Magistrate and member of the State Press Gallery was an unsuccessful candidate for St Kilda Council's South Ward in both 1959 and 1963 when campaigning on a theme of 'clean up St Kilda' (Longmire 1989: 208-9). However, the Council's apparent reluctance to initiate a proactive response was at least partially responsible for the increasing incidence of prostitution. Victorian magistrates, driven to frustration by the regular appearance of the same women in their courts, were publicly critical of the municipal Council's seeming inactivity.<sup>2</sup>

The State Government did not share the Council's preference for discretion and the government of the day was moved to consolidate the various Council prostitution offences and bring them under state control via the 1957 *Police Offences (Prostitution) Act*. This legislation also increased penalties for soliciting offences and included provisions dealing with male prostitution – the first legislative acknowledgement in Victoria of the existence of male prostitution, a taboo subject previously 'dealt with' by the prohibition of homosexuality and sodomy.

By 1966, such was the visibility of street prostitution in St Kilda that the Southern Branch of the Real Estate and Stock Institute of Victoria blamed its 'unchecked rise' for increasing vacancies and falling property values in the area (Longmire 1989: 209). In this environment, the concerns of local residents and business groups began to gain momentum. Despite several failures by anti-prostitution campaigners at the ballot box, the Liberal candidate for St Kilda, Brian Dixon was successful in being elected to State Parliament in 1964 on an anti-prostitution platform. In fulfilling his campaign

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<sup>2</sup> The Council was not helped by a dramatic increase in car ownership and, subsequently, the number of men 'cruising' the streets and raising demand for prostitutes (Longmire 1989).

promises, Dixon was instrumental in the passage of the *Summary Offences Act* (1966). Prostitutes who worked the streets now did so at the risk of imprisonment (Longmire 1989). Dixon was also a central figure in the drafting of amendments to the 1957 *Police Offences (Prostitution) Act* to introduce penalties for 'gutter crawling'. The language accompanying the amendments continued to reflect the double standards of anti-prostitution laws. The offence of 'gutter crawling', for example, was a measure that sought to 'prevent young men, in the main, seeking the gross favours of females' (in Advisory Council 2002). Needless to say, these initiatives did little to contain prostitution (a factor not helped by police shortages throughout the 1960s (Longmire 1989)). The lack of any obvious impact upon the street trade did little to encourage further political action and there were only sporadic amendments to the existing framework of offences over the next decade.

It was during the 1970s that the street sex trade in St Kilda underwent a significant change and began to assume many of its current characteristics. One reason for this change was an influx of 'unattached' youths, a consequence of dramatic increases in youth unemployment and the attraction of St Kilda as a place of notoriety and entertainment. Although those on low incomes could afford semi-permanent accommodation in the form of cheap rooming houses, many of the young people flocking to the area had to make do with little or no income at all (Longmire 1989). In the 1970s, young people aged less than 16 had no legitimate source of independent income, regardless of their housing status. Those aged 16-18 were eligible for just \$36 income support per week. For some of these young people, sex work was one of few available means of income. A second reason for the changing nature of street sex work was the emergence of large-scale drug trafficking in Australia. By the mid-1970s, criminal syndicates were distributing drugs, increasingly heroin, throughout Melbourne (McCoy 1980). Fitzroy Street in St Kilda was the location of the first notable street trade in heroin within Melbourne (Mercer 1999). This was also the location of the street sex trade. In February 1980, St Kilda police told the media:

... there are now six major heroin dealers operating in [Fitzroy] street. And 30 to 40 addicts sell poor quality heroin to be able to buy for themselves (Murdoch 1980a: 9).

The temporary euphoria and / or emotional escape of drugs doubtless offered some respite from a harsh and unpalatable reality for many vulnerable young people in St Kilda. Indeed, the falling age of drug users had become a cause for concern throughout the community. Following a study in 1979 by the Foundation of Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Foundation Chair, Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop drew attention to the changing characteristics of the 'typical' drug user:

Disturbing trends are developing in the pattern of drug abuse ... the number of young teenage addicts is growing disproportionately. In 1976, nearly 13 per cent of narcotic and barbiturate addicts were in the 10 to 19 years age group. But this age group is now estimated to represent about one quarter of total referrals (Dunlop 1980: 11).

It was the combination of youth and drug dependency that was primarily responsible for the changing the nature of the sex trade in St Kilda. Meeting the needs of a drug dependency creates a corresponding need for a regular and substantial income. It was perhaps inevitable that drug dependent young people in St Kilda, already surviving on a limited or non-existent income, would turn to the most visible and flexible and one of the few accessible means of income earning activity in the area. One of many tabloid exposes of life in the 'sin city' of St Kilda drew links between the Fitzroy Street drug trade, Dickensian 'street urchins of St Kilda' and street prostitution, observing:

For some prostitutes it is a way to pay for drugs ... It's not difficult on Fitzroy Street to find places to take clients. Even toilets are rented by [restaurant] owners (L'estange 1983, 12-13).

Senior-Sergeant Bert Gaudion, then a local police officer, reported that 'prostitutes of old' had been driven from the area by sex workers desperate for money to satisfy their drug dependencies. He observed:

Prostitutes of old would now be too scared to stand on a corner in St Kilda. Four years ago the pros working the streets were aged 24-40 ... some of them housewives earning extra money while the husband was at work. They were decent people. You could talk to them. Today, the prostitutes are aged 17 to 25; their lives are one drug fix to another (in Murdoch 1980a: 9).

The association of illicit drug use, sex work and youth was the subject of relentless media attention throughout the 1970s and 1980s. While articles were primarily concerned with Melbourne's recently acquired reputation as the illegal 'brothel capital' of Australia (e.g. Lawrence 1978), many of these sought to underscore the relative hygiene and safety of the brothel environment through a comparison with the street sex trade in St Kilda. The manager of one escort agency noted: 'I tend to pick a better class of girl – you know, not someone who worked the streets in St Kilda' (Lawrence 1978, 18). In another article, an officer in the Victorian Department of Social Welfare took time to address the 'tragic' types working on the streets.

The worst types, the most tragic, they're the ones that work the streets. They could be transvestites, homosexuals, anything. Mostly they are heroin addicts. They've got to get money for a fix, and usually they are very aggressive ... It's pretty hard to get the courage to work on the streets unless you are on drugs. Once a girl starts, there's no way out. In St Kilda, you see them in Robe Street, Acland Street, Fitzroy Street (Duncan, 1979, 28).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The Council was not helped by a dramatic increase in car ownership and, subsequently, the number of men 'cruising' the streets and raising demand for prostitutes (Longmire 1989).

Periodic police blitzes were initiated in the wake of increasing visibility. These blitzes were largely concentrated in Fitzroy Street given the publicity surrounding illicit activities on the popular shopping strip in the late 1970s and early 1980s. These blitzes did have a notable, although unintended, effect. Rather than suppressing the illicit street sex trade, intensive policing was responsible for dispersing sex workers – driving them away from commercial areas and into the relative darkness and reduced visibility of nearby residential streets. These inadvertent consequences stood in stark contrast to the aims of St Kilda police as articulated by one local Senior Sergeant in 1987:

We won't allow them [sex workers] in residential streets. People are sick and tired of finding syringes and condoms in their driveways. They are entitled to be protected from prostitutes in their front garden (Masanauska 1987, 11).

Nearly twenty years later, large numbers of sex workers continue to solicit trade in residential streets. These dark and sometimes isolated locations continue to attract workers keen to avoid the same police who pledge to keep them out of these areas. The inevitable frustration that arises as a consequence of conflicts between the aims and consequences of police actions was partially responsible for a deterioration of relations between police and sex workers in the late 1990s. In July 1998, a meeting was held between representatives of local agencies and service providers in St Kilda and members of St Kilda police in an attempt to address this issue. Although the relationship between police officers and street-based sex workers is sometimes strained, a number of formal agreements have been reached between local police and service providers.

It was not until the mid-1980s that the illegal commercial sex industry in Victoria underwent significant legislative reform. The impetus came from the public outcry over the proliferation of illegal brothels, known as 'massage parlours', throughout Melbourne (Johnston 1984). The Cain Labour Government in Victoria responded by introducing the *Planning (Brothels) Act 1984*, legislation under which brothel owners were able to apply for permits in 'appropriately zoned areas' (Neave 1985: 6). Ironically, the legalisation of brothels in accordance with strict planning regulations forced many workers onto the streets. Prior to the 1984 legislation, there were an estimated 150 brothels in Victoria. By 1990, strict licensing requirements had reduced these numbers to just 58. The reduction in employment opportunities within legal brothels, in conjunction with the long shifts expected by brothel managers, was directly responsible for many former workers leaving the relatively security of the now legal brothel industry to seek 'business' on the street (Masanauska 1987).

In a bid to address *all* aspects of the sex industry, the Cain Government appointed a state inquiry to explore the social, legal and health impact of all forms of prostitution. Professor Marcia Neave, former Chair in the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University, was appointed to chair an inquiry that subsequently made several recommendations for the reform of current approaches and laws relating to commercial

sex. The 1985 *Final Report of the Inquiry into Prostitution (the Neave Report)* made 91 recommendations, including:

- w That prostitution-related activities should be criminal offences only to the extent necessary to prevent harm to prostitutes and those at risk of becoming prostitutes, and to protect the community from demonstrable nuisance caused by prostitution-related activities (Advisory Council 2002: 28).

In keeping with this recommendation, a number of recommendations sought to specifically address the street-based sex trade:

- w That a provision be inserted in the *Local Government Act 1958* to enable by-laws to be made permitting street prostitution in defined areas;
- w Our recommendation is that councils should be permitted to define areas in which soliciting and loitering for the purposes of prostitution may lawfully occur. This would enable the St Kilda Council to define suitable areas for street prostitution. Street prostitutes who look for clients outside these areas and men who go to other areas looking for a prostitute should remain subject to criminal penalties. We also recommend policing practices in St Kilda should place greater emphasis on the apprehension of clients of prostitutes (in Advisory Council 2002: 29, 12).

Despite St Kilda Council's explicit support for these recommendations the State Government's legislative response – the *Prostitution Regulation Act 1986* – met all the recommendations made by the Neave inquiry with the exception of those pertaining to street prostitution. The Cain Government *did* seek the decriminalisation of street sex work, a long-standing aim of advocacy groups such as the Prostitutes Collective of Victoria (PCV). However, the weight of conservative numbers in the Upper House led to the removal of the relevant sections from the proposed legislation. Once the dust settled, there had been no effective change to the status of street sex workers at all.

In 1994, the Coalition Kennett Government undertook its own review of the law relating to prostitution. This led to the introduction of the 1994 *Prostitution Control Act* and established a new range of penalties for street sex work offences, from one month imprisonment and / or a \$500 fine for a first offence to 6 months imprisonment and a fine of up to \$6,000 for repeated offences, particularly those that occur in close proximity to schools, churches, hospitals or public places frequented by children. Between 1996/7 and 2000/1, 1,359 charges were upheld against street sex workers under the provisions of the 1994 Act.

However, the focus of the State Government was not strictly punitive. In 1997, the Prostitution Control Act Advisory Board, a body established by the *Prostitution Control Act*, sought to prioritise 'exit strategies' for *female* street sex workers. The Board argued that an integrated package of assistance for female street sex workers should be developed and provided by the government to assist them to leave the industry' (Advisory Council 2002: 30). The 'package', as initially envisioned by the Advisory



Board, would incorporate drug treatment, housing assistance and access to vocational programs. However, despite the Board's recommendations, no action was taken. In a meeting held between Salvation Army Crisis Services staff and representatives of the Board in March 2005, it was apparent that the priority accorded to exit strategies remains high. Nonetheless, significant action is yet to be taken. The following are the key (and current) provisions under the *Prostitution Control Act* regarding street prostitution:<sup>4</sup>

- w Sections 12 and 13: Provide general prohibitions against soliciting and loitering for the purposes of prostitution. These provisions create offences for both workers and clients;
- w Section 16: Prohibits offensive behaviour towards sex workers in or near a public place.

Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, Fitzroy Street St Kilda remained the sole site for the street (i.e. visible) trade in drugs. In the mid-1990s, however, the entry of Indochinese criminal elements saw the dynamics of the Melbourne heroin trade change considerably (Mercer 1999). An influx of heroin was responsible for a dramatic fall in price along with a corresponding increase in purity. Further, there was a shift in the street trade of heroin from its small base in St Kilda to a rapidly expanding (and highly conspicuous) markets in the Melbourne CBD and adjoining suburbs. A link was subsequently drawn between the accessibility of cheap and pure heroin and its increasing use among progressively younger people (Lynskey, Hall 1998). At the same time, researchers found that young women's frequency of drug use, once significantly lower than that of men, was reaching new heights (Turner et al. 2003). These trends led researchers to link the increased accessibility of heroin to the dramatic increase in street prostitution over the same period (Press & Szechtman 2004). Interestingly, although the drug market spread beyond St Kilda, the suburb has remained the only established site of illegal street-based sex work.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, there was a visible increase in the numbers of street workers in St Kilda.

It would be wrong to put too great an emphasis on problematic drug use as this is one of many issues that comprise the lives of street sex workers in St Kilda. Fieldhouse and Maltzahn (1998), once workers at the Sacred Heart Women's House in St Kilda, note that many of the sex workers they have engaged with have had experience of drug use; sexual abuse; institutionalisation (through prisons, psychiatric hospitals and / or as state wards); social isolation; chronic homelessness; mental illness; poor physical health; police harassment; and involuntary separation from their children. In this context, drug use may

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<sup>4</sup> Printed in and reproduced from Advisory Council (2002: 31-2).

<sup>5</sup> The informal camaraderie that exists within the injecting drug using community ensures that information relating to changing trends in price, purity and location of product is soon shared. The stigma associated with payment for sexual activity means there is no such information sharing amongst the 'gutter-crawling' clients of illicit sex workers. Consequently, although there are isolated reports of sex work occurring on a small scale in areas outside of St Kilda, the established nature of the trade in the latter suburb means that this is where the demand remains concentrated and, consequently, where sex workers congregate in large numbers.

be a form of self-medication that keeps the negative aspects of these experiences at bay. Indeed, these experiences may be intersecting aspects of an individual's day-to-day life. At the same time, it is important to emphasise, as is evident in this report, that such circumstances are far from applicable to all street sex workers.

In 2000, the City of Port Phillip undertook a Street Sex Policy Review. Amongst the findings of the Review were that the greater majority of street sex workers (80%) were estimated to be less than 30 years of age. Approximately one-third were thought to be under the age of 20 (Press 2000). Following consultation with local services, the approximate numbers of workers put forward were:

- w Approximately 100 female workers (working primarily in Grey, Greeves and Carlisle Streets);
- w Approximately 35-40 male workers (in Chaucer Street / Shakespeare Grove); and
- w Approximately 20-25 transsexual workers: (in the Belford / Irwill streets);<sup>6</sup>

The Street Sex Policy Review shed light on male and transsexual workers, an aspect of the street sex trade in St Kilda that, although long-standing, has rarely been subject to the type of attention paid to female sex workers (Press 2000; Mindel & Estcourt 2001). Although Longmire's history of St Kilda describes the area's association with prostitution in considerable detail, there is little mention of male prostitution and none of transsexual workers. Despite the fact that it remains a taboo subject for some, male and transgender workers have been visible in St Kilda for many years. Certainly, their numbers (and hence their visibility) are significantly less than those of their female counterparts, which, in part, explains why relatively little is known about male and transsexual workers.

The most recent study of street-based sex work in St Kilda was undertaken by the Attorney-General's Street Prostitution Advisory Group in 2002 (hereafter known as the Advisory Council). The Advisory Council was an appointment of the Victorian Government that undertook a detailed analysis of street sex work in St Kilda. The recommendations of this inquiry are the subject of discussion below. At this stage, it is sufficient to reproduce the Advisory Group's appraisal of the extent of illicit commercial sex activity on St Kilda's streets:

St Kilda police estimate the figure today [2002] to be between 300-350 over a twelve month period, and about 50 female sex workers on the street in peak periods. From arrest statistics, the most commonly arrested women are those aged under 25, followed by women aged 25-34. A large number of street sex workers are working to support a drug dependency, and research suggests a large number are also homeless. Sex workers also suffer from difficulties in accessing assistance and services ...

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<sup>6</sup> It is important to recognise that these estimates are a snapshot at a certain time. Since late 2000, Melbourne (and Australia in general) experienced a dramatic reduction in the availability of heroin. This has been used as a reason to explain a decrease in the numbers of street-based sex workers in St Kilda. Nonetheless, numbers remain significant. Further, there are indications that the availability of heroin is again increasing (see IDRS 2005).

Prostitutes are now working on the streets of St Kilda 24 hours a day, seven days a week. There are now established early morning and afternoon markets for street sex with clients, principally businessmen, tradesmen and taxi drivers travelling to and from work, or during their lunchbreaks. Sex workers service clients in cars, laneways, front and backyards and parks, and clients often drive their cars through residential streets and openly solicit women on the street (Advisory Council 2002: 39)

## LOCAL COMMUNITY RESPONSES

Throughout the history of prostitution in St Kilda, and particularly its later association with drugs and crime, the municipal Council has been forced to confront divisive questions about which interests it represents and the 'type' of people it wants living in St Kilda. For many years, councillors have had to address complaints from residents and business owners with valid concerns about the impact of visible street prostitution on local amenity. The following is an excerpt of a letter received by the Mayor in 1932:

Your park is littered with Motor Cars at night and goes right into the Morning of the following day and Disgraceful Conduct is the order. Next morning when one goes to exercise His Dog, It repeatedly Picks up Frog Skins You Know What I Mean [sic] (in Longmire 1989: 19).

Although complaints would increase in volume (in correlation with the extent of illicit sex work), it was not until 1978 that a residential lobby group, known as Westaction, began to actively lobby for the removal of sex workers from the suburb. Westaction initially had a membership of approximately 100 residents from the area's West Ward (although it would later expand to include other residents) (Johnston 1984). In response to the publicity that Westaction was attracting, a coalition of female sex workers added their voice to the community debate under the name the Prostitutes Action Group (PAG). The PAG had three key objectives:

1. To form a coherent idea of the most reasonable legislation to regulate prostitution;
2. To demystify the nature of prostitution in the public sphere; and
3. To maintain a support group for prostitutes as well as the formation of a prostitutes' organisation.

In November 1978, a forum on residential amenity held at St Kilda Town Hall was the site of a clash between Westaction and the PAG. Audience support was firmly with Westaction and the voices of PAG members were lost amidst audience uproar whenever they sought to contribute to the discussion. In contrast, Westaction spokesman, Graham Bradbury's views, including the following, were met with resounding applause:

The victims [of prostitution] are those people whose property values have eroded and whose addresses have become a dirty joke (in Johnston 1984: 341).

As Jackson and Otto (1984) note, gentrification had been an issue in St Kilda as early as the late 1970s when several boarding and rooming houses were converted into private residences and strata titles became common. Certainly, capital investment was a primary motivation for the Westaction campaign. One of the most concerning aspects of this campaign was the fact that some of its members and supporters went further than simply attending public forums. A vigilante mentality was responsible for residents recording number plates and, in cases, throwing water at working girls and stones at the cars of clients. Spurred by the publicity that a number of vocal and influential ratepayers had attracted, and doubtless keen to halt further confrontations between residents and workers, the first months of 1979 saw a police crackdown (Operation Zeta) on illicit sex workers in St Kilda (Johnston 1984). One response to the efforts of the anti-prostitution campaigners was the further politicisation of sex workers. Rather than being cowed by resident action, sex workers reiterated their commitment to a strong representative lobby group to represent their interests. For many, this was an unexpected development, not least given the widely held, and often sympathetic, conviction that sex workers are powerless victims of gender inequity. As Fair argues:

Now that sex workers have come out from behind the red light in sex workers rights groups around the world we are beyond the stage where we regard sex workers as degraded by their work or forced into it: Many women choose to work as an alternative to factory work or the legal brothels or to be their own boss (1991, 4).

The PAG was renamed Hetaira<sup>7</sup>, a name chosen so as to avoid the negative connotations associated with the word 'prostitute'. In July 1979, Hetaira was responsible for organising a second public meeting, a consequence of which was the formation of SKRAG (St Kilda Residents' Action Group) to protect the 'lower classes' of the local community including street sex workers.

Unfortunately, a lack of funds meant that Hetaira had a relatively short life as an advocacy group. However, the Australian Prostitutes Collective (APC), formed in Melbourne in September 1983, later took up the group's work. Similarly, the goals of SKRAG taken up once again when a group of residents calling themselves *Turn the Tide* began a campaign to elect councillors with a commitment to social justice and a willingness to protect the unique character of St Kilda (Press & Szechtman 2004). In the 1987 election, eight of the municipality's 12 elected councillors had affiliations with *Turn the Tide*. This marked a dramatic (and still current) change in the Council's response to street sex work. Instead of urging police activity, the new Council oversaw a range of measures including street barriers to disrupt the 'driving circuits' of street sex activity. Unfortunately, these measures inadvertently displaced the sex trade, spreading it further throughout the residential streets of St Kilda. The Council also established a street prostitution strategy committee and devoted considerable resources to reducing the social impact of street prostitution (Press & Szechtman 2004). In the same year as

<sup>7</sup> In ancient Athenian society, Hetaira were essentially sexual 'entertainers'. However, they often had intellectual training and artistic talents that made them more 'entertaining' companions than their wives.

the election of the '*Turn the Tide*' councillors, the APC received its first Victorian funding grant. In 1988, the APC changed its name to the Prostitutes Collective of Victoria (PCV) and relocated to premises in Grey Street, St Kilda. The rationale of the organisation was set out in 1991 as follows:

The PCV functions mainly as a support, information referral and advocacy agency for past and current sex workers with the broad goal of attaining basic civil rights for sex workers. The information and advocacy PCV provides ranges from health issues to how to make a complaint in the instance of police harassment (Fair 1991, 2).

In 1994, the City of Port Phillip came into being, a consequence of the Kennett Government's amalgamation of the former St Kilda, South Melbourne and Port Melbourne Councils. The response of the current Port Phillip Council to street-based sex work remains underpinned by the principles of harm reduction that have defined Council responses to this issue since 1987. The City of Port Phillip Healthy and Safer City Plan outlines the Council position on a range of social, legal, health and governance issues, including:

... provision of designated areas for street sex work with minimum adverse impact on residents and support for the establishment of safe house brothels along with a collaborative approach between State Government, council, residents, sex workers to address adverse impacts (City of Port Phillip 1997b in Press & Szechtman 2004: 78).

In February 2000, responsibility for the administration of the PCV was transferred to Inner South Community Health Services. In January 2001, the PCV and its programs were launched under the new name of RhED – Resourcing Health and Education in the Sex Industry. RhED remains a component of ISCHS and is funded primarily by the Victorian Department of Human Services. Despite political recognition (and funding) of sex worker advocacy and education programs, a significant number of residents remain in favour of a traditional, prohibitive law enforcement response to illicit sex work.

In 2000, residents demanding action against street-based sex work were behind the formation of another lobby group, the Port Phillip Action Group (PPAG) (Press & Szechtman 2004). Certainly, all parties to this issue, sex workers included, acknowledge that street sex work results in a significant loss of amenity for local residents, particularly those women subjected to the propositions of 'mugs'<sup>8</sup> when walking their own streets. Complaints are also made about the volume of traffic in residential streets and 'littering' in the form of (used) condoms and syringes. 'Sex tourists' are a particular problem. These carloads of sometimes intoxicated males are a problem due to the excessive noise they make and due to their indiscriminate harassment of sex workers, clients and residents (Rowe 2003). Resident concerns were given authoritative support by a 2000 Victoria Police profile of Port Phillip:

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<sup>8</sup> Clients are almost universally referred to as 'mugs' by sex workers. Particularly violent or aggressive clients are known as 'ugly mugs'.

Street prostitution has been identified as not only a high profile public order problem in St Kilda, but also one which is linked to the high drug use and trafficking problems in the area, as well as other related crimes such as residential burglaries. This high profile problem draws large numbers of both groups and individuals to the area. Local residents highlighted the possible links with these groups and other street crime such as assaults, robberies and general nuisance activity around the Fitzroy Street area (in Advisory Council 2002: 62).

In February 2001, PPAG members undertook a protest march against the presence of sex work activity in residential streets. Taking a stance against a Council plan to designate areas for street sex work, PPAG Chairwoman Anne Peterson stated:

We will be working with governments to ameliorate conditions for all stakeholders, with a bottom line that street sex work is not acceptable in any area (Chessell 2001: 2).

Such a statement seems to suggest that sex workers were not seen as stakeholders in respect of the issue of sex work. In any event, it is worth noting the distinct divide in local community responses to street sex work. Approximately 250 people came together to march under the PPAG banner. Two smaller groups met them, including local residents marching in support of sex workers. One resident observed:

It's true that there are safety concerns in St Kilda but people are very narrow-minded if they simply point the finger at sex workers. We need to look at unemployment, homelessness and drug addiction to get the whole picture (in Chessell 2001: 2).

Echoing these sentiments, another long-term female resident saw the PPAG campaign as unfairly targeting vulnerable victims of the government's 'punitive welfare policy'. In putting her view, she echoed the response of police to similar complaints made by residents of the Melbourne CBD in the late nineteenth century:

The sex trade has never bothered me. It's the drugs that have come into the area that's caused problems. They have to understand these people are victims. If [the protestors] don't like the idea, they should not have moved in (in Munro 2001, 5).

St Kilda is home to a population of diverse individuals, many of who have been drawn to the area by its reputation and the perception that it accommodates lifestyles that do not necessarily conform to traditional family ideals (Press & Szechtman 2004). Artists, performers, sex workers, drug users, transvestites and homosexuals all add to the unique character of St Kilda (Bird (2004) in Press & Szechtman 2004). Indeed, the social diversity of St Kilda has long been a selling point for estate agents, council members and business owners who market the municipality as a place of 'difference' and 'tolerance' (Kerkin 2003).

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<sup>9</sup> 'Revanche' is a French term that can be translated as 'revenge'. Revanchism is usually associated with political policies designed to recover lost territory or status.

A number of long-term residents who were attracted to the area's diversity and tolerance and who have since been witness to the gentrification of Port Phillip have expressed bemusement, resentment and disbelief over the residential backlash against *certain* aspects of St Kilda's diversity. That said, demographic change in Port Phillip *has* been significant over recent decades. In 1981, just 16.1 per cent of households were in the highest quartile for annual income earners. By 1996, this figure was 25.7 per cent. The number of professionals living in central St Kilda has grown in excess of 50 per cent between 1991 and 1996 (Advisory Council 2002). Many of these individuals, including a number of media-savvy residents with a commitment to family (and property) values, have taken a firm stance against street sex work. These residents' represent elements of what Smith (1996) calls 'revanchist antiurbanism'<sup>9</sup>, a reaction that emerges when people move to a new locality and their expectations of the locality and its population are not met (Smith 1996 in Kerkin 2003). Instead, they discover, in Smith's words, 'the enemy within' and develop an 'obsession with the apparent dangers and violence of everyday life.' Smith (1996: 211) argues that the response of these groups is simply a defence of the privileges 'cloaked in the populist language of civic morality, family values and neighbourhood security.'

Ironically, it has been the ongoing gentrification of central St Kilda that is partially responsible for increasing the visibility of some of the more confronting aspects of the street sex trade. Rising property values and new housing developments have led to the sale and closure of cheap 'half-hour' hotels used by sex workers for 'servicing' clients. Workers now have far fewer options. Not only are clients collected on the street, the 'service' they negotiate is more likely to take place in a public location (e.g. cars, laneways and parkland). The actions of policy makers and law enforcement agencies in the 1980s have also been a major influence on the visibility of the street-based sex trade by inadvertently driving them into residential areas. It was this visibility that led to concerted political action at the State Government level in 2002.

## THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S STREET PROSTITUTION ADVISORY GROUP

The visible growth in 'soliciting and loitering', as well as an increase in offensive behaviour, was the impetus for the Bracks' Labor Government's appointment of the Attorney-General's Street Prostitution Advisory Council in 2002. Incorporating 20 members, the Advisory Council was a diverse body, including state politicians, representatives from Port Phillip Council, St Kilda police and residents' associations as well as community services in frequent contact with street sex workers. Only one 'street sex representative'<sup>10</sup> was included in the Council, although two consultative forums were held with street sex workers.

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<sup>10</sup> This worker was a significant contributor to this report.

The three key principles that framed the Advisory Group's investigation were:

- w That the issue of street sex work is not a moral issue;
- w That street sex work cannot be eradicated;
- w That harm minimisation (as opposed to prohibitionist law enforcement) would produce the most positive outcome for the whole St Kilda community and the municipality of Port Phillip.

These principles drew on the evidence that past law enforcement efforts, including intensive police 'crackdowns', had had no discernable effect other than to spread street prostitution into residential areas. This had the effect of endangering the wellbeing of sex workers by encouraging them to solicit for and service clients in dark, isolated environments. In a bid to address both the vulnerability of the workers, as well as the loss of residential amenity, the Advisory Group put forward, as the cornerstone of a comprehensive strategy, the recommendation that:

Geographic areas ['tolerance zones'] be established in the City of Port Phillip in which police resources would not be targeted at persons loitering and soliciting for the purposes of prostitution (as defined under section 12 and 14 of the *Prostitution Control Act 1994*). Instead, police resources and strategies should target loitering and soliciting offences in locations outside tolerance areas (Advisory Group 2002: 55).

In order to meet resident concerns, the Advisory Council set strict planning criteria to be met before an area would be given approval as an appropriate site for a tolerance zone. The primary objective was to locate street sex activity in areas where it would cause least harm and nuisance. To further protect both workers and clients from the threat of assault and harassment, the Advisory Group also recommended

That safe and secure venues [to be known as street worker centres] be established in the City of Port Phillip for street sex workers to service clients (Advisory Council 2002: 64).

Prospective managers of street worker centres would need to meet stringent requirements to ensure both workers and clients adhere to 'safe sex' practices. Further, prospective managers would need to provide information and appropriate referrals for those seeking to exit the sex trade. Prohibitive regulations would ban underage sex workers from street worker centres and tolerance zones. The intention was to increase the visibility of underage workers, assisting service providers seeking to address the needs of this particularly vulnerable group.

Responsibility for compiling a shortlist of proposed tolerance zone sites was delegated to Port Phillip City Council. Although a difficult task, considering the divergent and conflicting views that any proposal would inevitably meet, the Council's long standing support of specific 'zones' for street sex work was an assurance of the effort that was subsequently put into achieving a solution acceptable to as many stakeholders (including



sex workers) as was possible. Indeed, as far back as 22 October 1997 the Council had formally resolved to support measures to achieve:

- w The decriminalisation of street sex work on condition that it operates in designated and safe non-residential areas;
- w A licence system for individual street sex workers to be considered which would require them to have regular health checks;
- w Safe houses / hotels to be introduced as another option to brothels with appropriate restrictions (Press 2000: 4).

The response of Bracks' Labor Government to the Advisory Council recommendations was initially favourable. Attorney-General Rob Hulls stated that the Government would implement the Council recommendations in full (Szego & Milburn 2002). However, by August 2002, three months prior to a forthcoming state election, the government announced the postponement of plans to introduce legislation to establish tolerance zones. This came not only prior to an election but also in the midst of a media-led backlash (Bolt 2002; Barnard 2002; Editorial 2002). Nevertheless, the government assured those affected that it was not dismissing the Advisory Council's recommendations but, rather, that further input was being sought.

In May 2003, the government, having been re-elected with a significant parliamentary majority, presided over the successful passage of the *Summary Offences (Offensive Behaviour) Bill*. As of late 2005, this remains the Victorian Government's only attempt to revisit the issue of street prostitution. The legislation in question deals with an ancillary aspect of street-based sex work – the so-called 'sex tourists' who 'cruise' the sex work circuit hurling abuse (and sometimes missiles) at workers. The new legislation authorises police to issue penalty infringement notices (i.e. fines) to save them the time-consuming process of arresting and charging 'sex tourists' with offensive behaviour. In introducing the legislation to Parliament, Richard Wynne MP, Chair of the Advisory Group, was explicit in stating that the government was no longer willing to entertain the notion of tolerance zones or safe houses:

The proposition of establishing tolerance zones and street workers centres has been ruled out by the Attorney-General, the Deputy-Premier and, most importantly, the Premier himself. It has been ruled out by the leadership of the party and I am happy to reassert that position today (Victorian Parliamentary Debates, 6 May 2003: 1376).

Less than four months later, sex worker Kelly Hodge disappeared from the St Kilda streets where she worked. Her naked and beaten body, wrapped in a blanket, was found dumped eight days later. In 2004, Grace Illardi, a mother from the western suburbs of Melbourne was beaten to death while working on St Kilda's streets. However, true to its word, (in this instance), the government has not revisited the issue of street sex work and safety.

Although lending support to the proposal for the establishment of tolerance zones and safe houses, sex worker advocacy groups have long been in favour of decriminalisation as the most suitable response to street-based sex work. Tolerance zones have a number of drawbacks, some of which arise in conversation with participants in this research. As one example, designating an area in which police maintain a low profile and exercise considerable discretion may encourage a concentration of illicit activities (e.g. drug sales) in such areas. The then PCV outlined its reasons for supporting decriminalisation as the 'best' option in a public document titled *10 Reasons to Decriminalise Street Prostitution* (Prostitutes Collection of Victoria u.d.). These reasons provide an appropriate context in which to consider the 'stories' and experiences of those who have contributed to this project.

1. **Prohibition does not work:** Although prostitution is legal in brothels, it is a crime to sell sex on the streets. The recent economic recession has seen the number of poor and unemployed entering street prostitution escalate rapidly. When we consider that street prostitutes are often homeless, unskilled, impoverished and drug addicted, and that prostitution is merely symptomatic of such a lifestyle, it is understandable that they will continue to reoffend until the reasons **why** they are on the street are addressed. Prohibition **has not**, and **cannot**, deal with these issues, nor has it **stopped** street prostitution.
2. **Decriminalising allows sympathetic planning initiatives:** By designating specific areas for street prostitutes to operate from, it will be easier to protect, inform and assist them in their efforts to leave the industry. A 'safe house' could be established in this area, while the safety and security of all people in the community would be ensured. St Kilda residents have been extremely vocal in their call for a 'red light' area in St Kilda and support decriminalisation of street prostitution. A designated area would allow police to utilise nuisance and offensive behaviour laws to control gutter crawlers.
3. **Decriminalisation will aid in preventing violence:** According to statistics collected by the PCV, an average of two rapes a week are suffered by street prostitutes in the area: at least one assault a night is reported to outreach workers. Street prostitutes are constantly robbed of any money they may have on them. The murderer/s of two street prostitutes this year remain in the community to strike again. While street prostitution remains a criminal act women will not report acts of violence to the police, and dangerous and predatory males will continue to jeopardise the safety of all women of St Kilda.
4. **Decriminalisation will stop a costly legal merry-go-round:** Currently, street prostitutes are arrested and fined regularly. Given that they are the poorest workers within the sex industry and that they have no other means of income, they are often compelled to spend more time on the streets to pay these fines, only to face another arrest. Unable to pay these fines, increasing numbers of women are being sent to prison. Upon release, and unsupported, they return to the streets. The cycle is never-ending. The tax payer is burdened by enormous legal, policing and prison costs. Decriminalisation saves everybody time and money.

5. **Decriminalisation will increase the effectiveness of HIV education:** The current Act undermines the invaluable work of programs funded by the [then] Department of Health and Community Services, in particular the HIV / AIDS / STD prevention education projects to workers in the sex industry, their managers and their clients.

The final report of the Legal Working Party of the Inter-Governmental Committee on AIDS recommends the repeal of laws criminalising sex industry work on the street, and that reforms be enacted 'allowing free flow of information and education on public health preventative measures by removing fear of prosecution and harassment'. Victorian legislation works against these objectives and we must ensure that any new legislation satisfies them.

6. **Decriminalisation will enable the community to focus on drug addiction amongst street prostitutes:** Between 60% and 80% of street prostitutes are drug addicted compared to only 17% of the entire sex worker community. The illegality of street prostitution exacerbates this problem by reducing the worker's opportunity to deal with drug addiction and its initial causes. Decriminalisation would allow drug rehabilitation specialists greater access to street workers. Steps could be undertaken to establish a much needed 24 hour drug detoxification unit in the heart of St Kilda, offering immediate assistance to those workers wishing to deal with their drug problems.

7. **Decriminalisation will aid in uncovering and addressing homelessness and poverty:** It is estimated that 90% of street prostitutes are homeless and living in poverty. The lifestyle related to street prostitution disallows many street workers from residing in refuges. Multiple disadvantages such as poverty, drug addiction and psychiatric disability only decrease street workers' chances of finding permanent accommodation. By eliminating the criminality of street prostitution, housing agencies and community workers will be able to access and assist street workers more easily and address issues contributing to their need to work on the streets.

8. **Decriminalisation will alleviate the stigma associated with street prostitution:** Because street prostitutes engage in an illegal activity by soliciting for sex on the streets, they attract a criminal record which stigmatises and ostracises them from the rest of the community indefinitely. Opportunities to leave prostitution by gaining employment are jeopardised by a criminal record. Prostitution is essentially a victimless crime, and not even considered a crime in legal brothels. Without the handicap of a criminal record, street workers would be more able to engage in exit and retraining programs in order to obtain skills, and enter the workforce.

9. **Decriminalisation will keep families together and decrease State Government child protection costs:** 46% of women working as street prostitutes are mothers, the majority being single mothers. Because they are engaging in illegal activities by working on the streets, they are likely to have their children removed from them by child protection workers. Even though (like women working in legal brothel), they may be earning extra money to support their families, they risk having their children

removed from their care. Many have already lost children. Children in care cost the State Government thousands of dollars a year per child.

10. **Decriminalisation will dramatically decrease the number of street prostitutes within five years:** A substantial decrease in the number of street prostitutes will occur if the criminal nature of the activity is abolished. Decriminalisation will allow specialist agencies and workers greater access to street prostitutes. Services and strategies such as drug detoxification centres, exit and retraining programs and housing programs will be more effective and provide opportunities and a better lifestyle to those who currently have so little.

Although logical and, in cases, self-explanatory these arguments are far from politically palatable. Consequently, there is a need to bring the issue to the fore of the policy agenda through other means. In this report, we seek to do so by reminding readers that when we talk of sex work, we are talking about individual human beings, people with a range of experiences and a variety of reasons that have brought them to where they currently are in their lives. In this respect, this report differs significantly from past attempts to examine issues of illicit sex work. Primarily this is because it seeks to offer the perspective of the workers themselves. As the discussion immediately below shows, much of the research that has been conducted to date has been discriminatory at worst and blinkered at best.

## STREET-BASED SEX WORK: AN INTRODUCTION TO PAST RESEARCH

Illicit street-based sex work is the most visible of the many varied forms of prostitution. Paradoxically, it is also that form of sex work about which least is known. Rather than a lack of research interest, this is a largely a consequence of ever-present 'moral' concerns that invariably accompany issues of sexuality that are *visible* within the broader social environment. Certainly, few public commentators are willing to look beyond sex work as 'a moral issue'. The attention paid to 'right' and 'wrong' and 'good' and 'bad' means that precious little is given to those whose lives are lost amidst the tabloid 'noise' that surrounds and often is *the issue*. Little, if any, consideration is given to the individual sex worker and the extent to which their involvement in the 'industry' is a voluntary act or a measure of the desperation of one's personal circumstances. Even more concerning is that moral concerns (and the social norms they reflect) have also had an influence on academic research. The following section provides a concise overview of major 'trends' in research in the area of street-based sex work.

Prior to the 1970s, Freudian theory was prominently used by researchers' seeking some foundation upon which to base the supposed 'pathology' of sex workers (Wilson 1971). Certainly, there was little thought given to the individual. Instead, sex workers were a homogenous group, an outlook that did not allow for consideration of social

context and its influence on an *individual's* involvement in sex work. Reports such as *The Psychopathology of Prostitution*, published by the British Institute for the Study and Treatment of Delinquency, were influential for many years. The author of this report (published in 1943 although still in print in 1969), acknowledged that any study of prostitution would need to pay attention to the 'contributing factors' of involvement in sex work. However, the factors identified in the report derive almost wholly from the aforementioned pathology of prostitutes. For example, 'atypical sexual development' led to 'sexual backwardness' among prostitutes. Further:

Almost 86 per cent of prostitutes exhibit some degree of intellectual or emotional backwardness ... Allowing an ample margin of error in the selection of cases, and an ample correlation for the amount of mental deficiency existing in the community as a whole, it is no coincidence that the degree of mental retardation discovered amongst prostitutes is high (Glover 1969, 9).

Glover does allow that economic and environmental factors may play a 'subsidiary role' in involvement in sex work. However, the absence of 'adequate family love' and subsequent psychological insecurity are seen to be *the* primary factor of influence (followed by 'manifest irregularity in the sexual life of the parents') (Glover 1969, 13). He dismisses accounts of economic hardship among sex workers, arguing that these are based on stories told by prostitutes and 'as has been mentioned, these are not very trustworthy' (Glover 1969, 14). It is worth noting two further aspects of Glover's report. Firstly, he focuses solely on sex work by women despite the existence of male sex workers and, secondly, he gives *no* consideration to the motives, pathology or identity of the clients of sex workers. The limited understanding that results simply underscores the widely held belief that prostitution is a consequence of the pathological insecurity and 'retarded sexuality' of *women*.

In the 1970s, the long overdue 'discovery' of child abuse (and domestic violence) in the patriarchal family home was an influential factor in shifting the research focus. Several studies put forward the argument that prostitution was a response from victims of childhood sex abuse to the informal stigmatisation that many felt. Certainly, there is a body of research to suggest that when adults, 'legitimate' figures of authority in the eyes of children, abuse children, their victims often believe that they have done something 'deserving' of punishment. Researchers went on to explore potential links between victims' subsequent attempts to escape the trauma of abuse (including homelessness and drug use) and involvement in sex work (e.g. AGSPAG 2002; Pyett & Warr 1999). However, while evidence was found in support of this hypothesis, others found that evidence was drawn from research conducted with sex workers. Further, this research continued the focus on the psychological health of sex workers while continuing to ignore the potential influence of social and structural factors (Neave in Boyle et al. 1997). Subsequent research was able to demonstrate that, although traumatic sexual abuse *does* have long-term negative effects 'this factor does not differentiate between adolescent prostitutes and nonprostitutes' (of similar age, race and socio-demographic background (Nadon et al. 1998). If anything, there had been a failure to appreciate the

prevalence of childhood sexual abuse among young people who did not enter into sex work. Nonetheless, such research remains prevalent. Dalla (2000) for example, expands on the above theories of childhood abuse as an antecedent to sex work:

1. A young *girl's*<sup>11</sup> self-concept changes as a consequence of abuse. She begins to view herself as debased, facilitating her identification with prostitution. Likewise, early victimisation provides training in emotional distancing that is re-enacted during sexual encounters with clients;
2. The causal link is indirect and mediated by behaviour that occurs in the aftermath an abusive episode or episodes (e.g. Running away, becoming homeless, needing money to survive, etc).

Despite the broadening focus of research, the idea that sex workers could comprise a heterogeneous group of individuals continued to elude academic (or other) enquiry. So too, for that matter, did the working lives of those 'on the game'. Researchers were motivated to understand entry into sex work rather than the *consequences* of involvement in sex work (Vanwesenbeeck 2001).

From the mid-1980s, the emergence of HIV / AIDS was responsible for the rise of 'moralistic' concerns that prostitutes may spread the virus (Vanwesenbeeck 2001). Investigation of prostitution as a source for HIV / AIDS transmission has found that these concerns had little basis in fact (i.e. rates of HIV transmission do not support these concerns). Instead, they rest on stereotypes of sex workers as promiscuous and desperate drug 'addicts' whose need for a 'fix' outweighs all concern for their own health and that of their 'clients'. In 2000, one article put forward the argument that: 'Not one case of HIV seropositivity has been demonstrated to be the result of commercial sex in Australia' (Brewis & Linstead 2000, 89). Although there is anecdotal evidence within this report that unsafe sex practices do occur in the street sex trade, the incidence and transmission of HIV is conditional upon contextual factors. Research in New Zealand, for example, found that male sex workers were more likely to engage in unsafe sexual practices in comparison to non-sex working 'men who have sex with other men'. Despite this, however, there was no difference in HIV rates between the two groups (Weinberg et al. 2001). The reason was the environment within which sex workers operated:

The most important of the contextual factors appears to be the small pool of infection. This, in turn, is related to a liberal political environment, an extensive IV drug culture, an attitude of inclusiveness, public HIV education and a national health system (Weinberg et al. 2001: 283-4).

Similar conditions exist in Australia where public health strategies have been responsible for the 'small pool of infection' in this country. In comparison, those countries with a zero tolerance attitude to IV drug use and sex work, the United States for example, have far higher rates of HIV prevalence among sex workers (Yoast et al. 200). Ironically, however, an association has been found between public health messages and an increase in the risk of

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<sup>11</sup> My italics.

HIV transmission during non-commercial sex. Many sex workers in intimate relationships attempt to separate sex-work from sexual relations with their partners. In part, this is due to health messages that advocate the use of condoms as compulsory during commercial sex encounters, a message that has been partially responsible for the view, held by some, that condoms are 'work equipment'. Those who hold this view may feel that using condoms in their personal relationship is akin to treating their partner as they would a 'mug' (Waddell 1996). Unfortunately, however, this is done with little thought for a partner's past sexual history and current sexual activities. Pyett and Warr (1997) also note the view that refraining from the use of condoms with a partner was akin to a sex worker stating that the relationship was 'real'. Although Pyett and Warr (1997) reported low rates of HIV among a sample of Melbourne-based female sex workers, they did note that these women had multiple short-term partners with whom they did not use condoms. Further, many of these partners were injecting drug users or had multiple sexual partners.

While the minimal spread of STIs and BBVs by sex workers is attributable to effective public health programs, it is important to recognise that 'unsafe sex' *does occur* in the street trade and, anecdotally, appears to be occurring with some frequency. Street workers, in particular, are at risk because of the ever-present threat of violence and intimidation that may affect their ability to negotiate with clients and because of the personal circumstances of workers whose immediate needs may outweigh their consideration of long-term health consequences. Economic incentives, for example, may be used to tempt desperate (often drug dependent) workers to engage in sex without a condom. Indeed, research in India suggests that sex workers who use condoms face large income losses due to clients' preference for condom-free sex (Rao et al. 2002). Although such research cannot necessarily be extrapolated to the streets of Melbourne, anecdotal evidence suggests that workers can make the amount of money they require far more quickly if they agree to condom-free sex. As O'Connell Davidson (1998) points out, the more 'in need' a worker is, the less freedom they have to dictate terms. Under such duress, sex workers may feel that they have no choice but to breach their own rules. These issues receive further attention below.

In recent years, there has been evidence of a further widening of research into sex work. The larger part of research *still* relates to the potential spread of STIs and / or the question of *why* people enter the illegal street sex trade. However, a third theme has been emerging. This relates to the routines and stresses associated with sex work and the ways in which workers deal with them (Vanwesenbeeck 2001). Part of the impetus for this interest in 'work-related issues' came from the formation of advocacy groups for sex workers. The identification of prostitution as 'work' emerged in the late 1980s when sex workers and advocacy groups sought to bring legitimacy to the trade rather than attempting to justify involvement in commercial sex for income (Hunter 1991). Brown (1999) suggests the need to unite the sex industry against exploitation by male businessmen (and to counter feminist arguments that portray prostitution as the objectification and abuse of women) led to the use of the term 'sex worker' as a political tool.

Given the political turn that sex work took in this period, it is important to briefly (and in admittedly rudimentary fashion) note the difficulties that (female) sex work poses for feminist theory. So-called radical feminists, such as the recently deceased Andrea Dworkin, argue that sex work in any form exploits women and reinforces their status as sexual objects (e.g. Dworkin 1982). In contrast, the basis for most feminist analysis of prostitution is that it is an example of women's structural inequality and the related lack of access to economic and political power (Boyle et al. 1997). Different theorists diverge at this point, particularly along the lines of 'sex work' as an occupation that challenges traditional notions of femininity (e.g. Perkins 1991; Fair 1991) and 'prostitution' as the oppression of women (e.g. Grosz 1995). O'Neill draws attention to the complexity of an issue that she argues cannot be seen in such black and white terms as 'empowerment' or 'oppression':

Issues of sexual politics are entwined with economic and political issues ... to create a Catch 22 situation for women who may not have freely chosen to work as prostitutes but nevertheless pragmatically have decided that it is the best option available to them (1997, 17).

The diverging nature of feminist responses to the issue of prostitution undermines the ability of sex workers to draw wider support from feminist critiques of violence against women (Morgan 2002). Sex workers themselves often have little involvement in academic debates that revolve around their activities. Even today, much feminist thought is theoretical and not the result of engagement with sex workers (Boyle et al. 1997). Pheterson (1993, 58) touched upon the divide between theorists and sex workers when quoting one female worker: 'I'd rather walk any street in the middle of the night than face a group of feminists.' A key conflict between feminist theory and sex worker advocacy groups is the view that prostitution will vanish in a society in which men and women are equal. Advocacy groups argue that this is naïve and misunderstands the demand for commercial sex. Inherent in the argument seems to be the belief that sex belongs in exclusive, semi-permanent relationships (Boyle et al. 1997). This is far from the experiences of sex workers who 'service' many, if not a majority, of clients who are already in semi-permanent relationships. Also of interest is the fact that some sex workers experience feelings of empowerment in sexual encounters. Vanwesenbeeck (2001) observes that a large variety of interactions exist with respect to issues of power and that commercial sex cannot simply be cast as men having power over women. This is not a debate that I have the space (or knowledge) to address in any detail. However, the experience of a minority of those who took part in this research provides some evidence of different power dynamics within commercial sex encounters. Suffice to say, what the above emphasises, is the futility and / or frustration in attempting to categorise sex workers within academic theory. Certainly, it is more productive to treat sex workers as individuals, each with their own unique experiences, rather than attempting to formulate universal theories that address sex workers as a homogenous population. It is partially the attempt to do so that has been responsible for the frustration of attempts to definitively understand different aspects of illicit sex work (Dalla 2000).



Obviously, feminist discussions of sex work largely ignore the existence of, and demand for, male sex workers. Browne and Minichiello (1996) suggest that male prostitution has been a peripheral issue for researchers, in part, because it contradicts arguments of prostitution's relationship to gender inequity. One of the few projects to engage with male sex workers in Australia sought to record the working habits of 186 male sex workers in Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne. Although only 17 per cent of the overall sample was found to be street sex workers, a much greater proportion of the Melbourne sample (25.4%) identified as street-based workers (Minichiello et al. 2000: 151). Anecdotal evidence suggests that, in comparison to female sex workers, a lesser proportion of male prostitutes are drug dependent. Further, anecdotal evidence, as related in this report, suggests that a minority of transsexual workers engage in street sex work to fund drug use.

Power dynamics and gender equity in sex work are understandably weighty issues when considered within an academic framework. The practical realities of the trade, however, are of far greater relevance to street sex workers – as well as to social services, law enforcement agencies and government authorities. With this in mind, there has been a (slowly) growing body of research investigating the 'working life' of sex workers. Even seemingly mundane aspects of street-based sex work (e.g. waiting) can cause anxiety. Spending hours waiting for clients without the ability to predict or control the pace of work causes tension given that, despite boredom, workers must remain alert to potential danger and maintain a demeanour necessary to attract clients (Brewis & Linstead 2000). The use of drugs is one strategy enabling workers to deal with these aspects of the job. Amphetamines, for example, increase alertness and / or confidence. Alternately, heroin decreases (or numbs) the guilt, shame and low self-esteem many workers experience (Rowe 2003a; Young et al. 2000; Brewis & Linstead 2000; Pyett & Warr 1999; Jarvis et al. 1998). Other researchers describe workers 'switching off the true self and going into remote control mode or adopting a role' (Browne and Minichiello 1995, 611). The common use of a 'street name' and a reluctance to divulge personal information to clients is indicative of the desire to keep work and non-work personalities separate (Brewis & Linstead 2000). Such explanations are borne out in the contributions of the participants in this project.

A particular interest of researchers has been the dangers of illicit street prostitution. The most obvious is the vulnerability of street sex workers who, because they work outside of legal regulation, are susceptible to violence at the hands of clients and others (Hatty 1989). Sex workers often enter environments over which they have little control and in which they are completely alone with clients (e.g. a client's car, deserted laneways). In such situations, workers are at a massive disadvantage should a client attempt to renege on an agreement or, worse, attempt to physically or sexually assault a worker (O'Connell Davidson 1998). Emotional, physical and sexual violence is an ever-present reality of street-based sex work (Jeal & Salisbury 2004; Rowe 2003a; Vanwesenbeeck 2001).

Because of the illegal nature of street-based sex work in Australia, many workers are reluctant to report incidents of violence to police. For some, this is due to past experiences dealing with unsympathetic police officers (Rowe 2003b). This reluctance also derives from perceptions of police harassment held by many workers. In those instances where a report *is* made, police make a decision about whether it is credible. Hatty (1989) argues that police are often sceptical. She suggests that it is the degree to which women conform to standards of 'appropriate female behaviour' that determines their status as victims deserving of action. Such attitudes extend to the courts. In 1992, a Victorian County Court judge made the ruling that the rape of a prostitute was not as serious a crime as the rape of a 'chaste' or 'good' woman. On appeal, the Supreme Court upheld the County Court ruling applying an earlier precedent to the effect that 'prostitutes suffer little or no sense of shame or defilement when raped' (Magazanik 1992, 9). Those men who rape and / or attack sex workers receive universally lower sentences than those whose victims do not engage in commercial sex. This anomaly reflects past beliefs about the pathological nature of those in the illicit sex trade and an attitude of 'what do you expect?' There is little evidence of the law being applied without fear or favour, despite the often brutal nature of attacks on sex workers. An unpublished Melbourne University report found:

Sex workers tend to be raped in a more violent manner involving more weapons, subsequently suffering more (physical) injury than non-sex workers. Their attackers tend to have a record of sexual offences and other violent crimes (Harrington & Bourke 1991).

Negative experiences with the criminal justice system ultimately teach illegal sex workers that the law exists to punish and control them rather than to protect them in the manner it exists to protect others (O'Connell Davidson 1998).

Sex workers of many years experience take a variety of precautions to enhance their control of an encounter – using intuition, never going with more than one client at a time, checking rear seats, working in partnership with others (either 'spotters' or other workers) and so on (O'Connell Davidson 1998). Obviously, however, none of these precautions *ensure* a worker's safety and there is a stoic acceptance that an amount of violence is part of the job. Australian researchers report that factors such as the age of the worker and the legal context of their work affect the degree of control an individual is able to exert over a sexual encounter (Pyett & Warr 1999). Many street workers enter the trade at a comparatively younger age than those in the legal industry. The youth and inexperience of these workers, along with the effects of drugs, contribute to the difficulties they face in minimising the risk of violence and / or participation in unsafe or unwanted sexual activity. Indeed, as seen in this report, some workers lose control of a sexual encounter when 'on the nod'. Furthermore, many younger workers have no strategies to minimise the ever-present risks of engaging in illicit and unregulated commercial sex (Pyett & Warr 1999).

For young, homeless and drug dependent workers, illicit sex work may be one of few means of survival. Certainly, those who use illicit drugs have difficulty finding work in the legal, regulated sex industry. Drug users are seen to be unreliable and may expose brothel or escort agency management to criminal liability if drugs are used on the premises. As noted above, the then Prostitutes Collection of Victoria estimated that between 60 and 80 per cent of street sex workers are 'drug addicted'. Homelessness and mental ill health are also reasons that lead to the exclusion of individuals from the legal sex industry. In summary, the street trade is one of few income raising options available to the most vulnerable individuals in the community. Brown (1999) suggests that this underscores a lack of consent that undermines the illegal prostitution 'as work' argument and supports critiques of illicit sex work as the exploitation of vulnerable individuals who believe they have little or no value outside of their sexuality.

A summary of the existing research would not be complete without a brief mention of research, despite its relative scarcity, that has sought to understand the clients of illegal sex workers. That research which has been done supports the aforementioned observation that a variety of power relations exist in commercial sex encounters.<sup>12</sup> Xantidis and McCabe (2000) draw on Vanwesenbeeck to identify three types of male clients of female sex workers.

- w The business type who understands the procedure and approaches transactions in a professional and 'businesslike' manner;
- w The romantic / friendship type needing to form a relationship. These men may have recently lost a partner. One sex worker told a researcher: 'They think they're in love with us. They feel guilty and responsible. They're always saying things like 'let me take you out of all this.' (Lawrence 1978, 21);
- w The misogynist client who enjoys wielding power over women and is sometimes violent. Xantidis and McCabe note that misogynistic men are more likely to be involved with street prostitutes who have less means of protection.

As the experiences of participants in this project show, encounters with each 'type' of client invariably arise. This project supports the findings of other research which notes that whilst street-based workers **will** encounter misogynists during their working hours, these men are far outnumbered by clients who fit into the first and second categories outlined above. Expanding on these categories, Wilson (1971, 75) outlines, (with brutal honesty), reasons why some men pay for sex. He suggests such reasons include unsatisfying relationships, 'unusual' sexual interests or simply the inability to form a (non-commercial) sexual relationship with a woman. In the case of the latter, the sex worker often exercises greater control over the encounter:

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<sup>12</sup> In undertaking this research, I did not engage with clients of sex workers. Their role in the street sex trade is only addressed to the degree that their behaviour affected the research participants.

Prostitutes are commercially impersonal and impartial, simply providing sexual gratification for a price, with no emotional obligations ... For the married man, prostitutes often provide an adequate sexual outlet when for some reason his wife does not ... Prostitutes sometimes provide little more than an ostensibly sympathetic ear to their problems. A man who either has a 'fetish' or indulges in unusual sexual practices may find that the only way he can gain sexual gratification is by paying for it. Provided he is willing to pay the right price, he is sure to find a prostitute who will indulge him without passing any value judgements ... Last but not least, prostitutes provide an outlet for men who are too physically repulsive to attract women by money.

Kinsey, the pioneering researcher of sex practices in the United States made a similar observation when, after interviewing numerous individuals about their sexual activities, he noted: 'some individuals are so feeble minded or repulsive that no girl but a prostitute would have intercourse with them' (1948, 608). Indeed, some sex workers see themselves as providing a valuable service to members of the community unable or unlikely to enter into a sexual relationship. One Dutch organisation, SAR, assists people with mental and physical handicaps to improve (or begin) their sex lives with trained sex workers.<sup>13</sup>

So where does that leave us and where does research go from here? What the above overview of existing research makes clear is that researchers all too often fail to acknowledge that sex workers are individuals with a range of different reasons for engaging in street work. This is because there has been relatively little research that has sought to engage with street sex workers in the interests or looking beyond the immediate issues of sex work, BBVs and violence associated with the 'industry'. Although these are issues that cannot be ignored in *any* study that explores street sex work, there is a distinct need to go further.

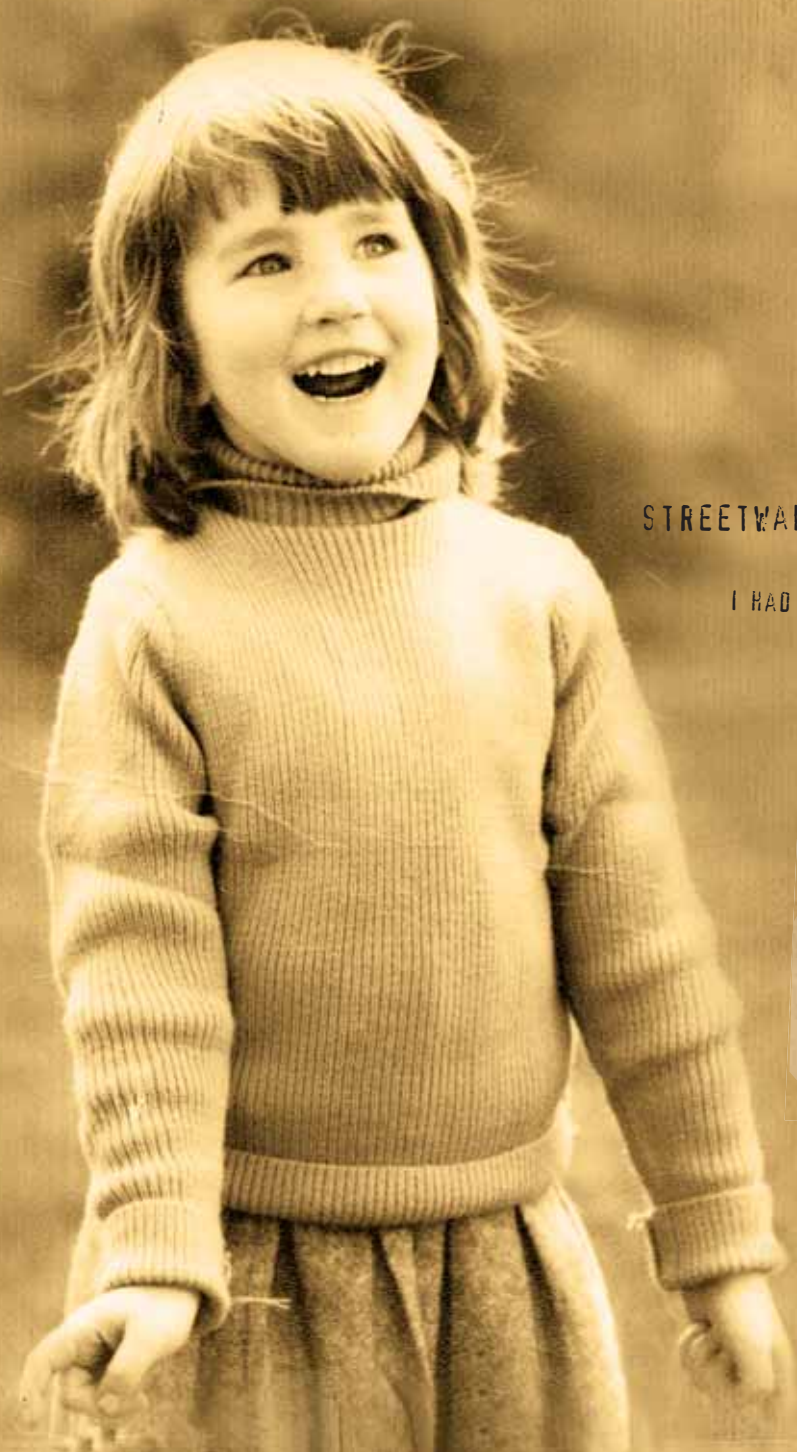
Those studies that *have* engaged sex workers as participants invariably engage with very different individuals who have come from specific social circumstances (e.g.. Phoenix 1999). This report reflects this reality by drawing on life experiences and stories as told by fourteen different individuals. Perhaps more importantly, it looks at the lives of *people* as opposed to *prostitutes*. Brown (1999) has highlighted a need for research to give a 'voice' to a population that remains unheard. He argues that a participatory ethic may breathe new life into those people who have suffered a 'social death' through the stigma that others associate with their lifestyles. The 'social death' he refers to is the stripping away of human characteristics and personalities to leave behind the stereotype that others see. Allowing individuals 'space' in which to tell their own unique stories 'restores' the humanity so often hidden behind what remains, for many, a moral issue. Narratives of personal experiences help to make sense of differences between people because they force us to acknowledge the humanity we share with the narrator. Because, believe it or not, sex workers grew up in families, went to school (and

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<sup>13</sup> See *Consenting Adults* V.2, Winter 1997/8 at <http://www.sfc.org.uk>

perhaps university), many have children of their own and all have opinions, outlooks and aspirations. Essentially a narrative that draws on these experiences compels others to look beyond the issue to see the person. And whilst someone may not be able to empathise with a 'prostitute' they should be able to empathise with another person. If done well, and I can only hope *it is* done well enough to meet my obligations to those to who have taken part in this project, the communication of personal experience reduces the distance between the reader and research subject, bypassing the process by which the media, policy makers and researchers abstract and generalise about the lives of others.

I HAD AN  
ALRIGHT  
CHILDHOOD



STREETWALKING BLUES  
- SEX WORK, ST KILDA AND THE STREET  
I HAD AN ALRIGHT CHILDHOOD



## I HAD AN ALRIGHT CHILDHOOD

It can present a challenge to the perceptions of many a 'law-abiding citizen' to think of illegal street sex workers as having once been a child, growing up in a loving family environment similar to their own. As noted, the stereotypes and stigma commonly associated with the working life of the 'prostitute' contribute to the 'social death' of sex workers. Put simply, sex workers are not seen as people but as socially constructed stereotypes - emaciated, drug-addled addicts, desperate to the point of selling their bodies (self-respect, dignity, etc.) for a 'fix'. In this context, the fact that many street workers come from families that are not particularly different from one's own can come as a surprise. It can also bring home the unappreciated reality that sex workers are people first and stereotypical constructs second.

**Althea (female, 40 years)** I was born in Auckland, New Zealand. I have a mother and a father who are still together and alive and very well and happy. I'm very close to my parents. My dad got a transfer and we came to Melbourne in Easter 1977. He used to work for Ampol. We lived in Box Hill. [We'd] look out the back kitchen onto the shopping centre car park ... a lovely, delightful view; stimulating when you're doing the dishes. My parents are middle class. My dad's good with investments and he worked his way up.

**Janine (female, 38 years)** I was born in Melbourne. I grew up in Melbourne and went to school in Caulfield at Shelford [Girls Grammar], down Glen Eira Road. [I was] baptised Presbyterian and went to a Church of England school, I mean it's all basically the same, isn't it? We had to go [to church], probably until about [the age of] 12, 13. Mum was the Sunday school teacher, so we had to go. And they used to have Monday school that we went to after school as well. And we also had church at school too ...

**Simon (male, 26 years)** I was born on Lord Howe Island. I grew up on Norfolk Island. My mum went from Lord Howe Island [where she was living] to Norfolk. She was working in one of the hotels and met my dad. I grew up there till I was about 14. I had an alright childhood I suppose. We never went without anything and got away with lots.

**Tina (transsexual, 30 years)** I came to Australia from South Africa. I wasn't abused. I was never physically abused. We were brought up strong and hard. My father was very hard but wasn't abusive. I had a very strong upbringing.

**Riley (male, 30 years)** I was born in Melbourne, in Upwey. My family background is working class. My father moved to Queensland because of work. He was a 'dogman'. They direct crane operators, blowing whistles and so on. He went up first and we moved up afterwards. I was four when we moved to Queensland.

While we were up there my parents' divorced. My father's still there. He remarried and had two kids, then divorced again ... Mum met someone else and we moved to the Central Coast of NSW when I was 6. We lived in a small community. Mum was a bit of a hippie. It was a pot smoker lifestyle. I think it was a bit much for her. She wasn't really into the country town thing and there weren't really any job opportunities. I think she just got sick of it so they moved back down to Melbourne, Upwey again, when I was 10.

**Emily (female 34 years)** I grew up between Melbourne and Bendigo - backwards and forwards. My mother was [previously] married and had my two sisters. My dad was [previously] married and had my brother and then they were both divorced. I think my mother didn't go out with anyone for six years 'cause the next sister is six years older than me. She met my father and she said she slept with him once and I came along.

My father was a plumber. When I was four, he fell from a roof and broke both his legs. He was stuck using a wheelchair for two years. His parents owned a hotel just outside Bendigo, and the family had to move in with them 'cause mum couldn't work - I was too little - and dad couldn't look after me and my older sisters. So we moved there into this pub for a few years.

When dad got better, we moved into the nearest town, Bendigo, but mum's always loved Melbourne, so when I was about 12, we moved back to Melbourne.

Mum and dad divorced when I was about 14. There was no fighting, the separation was amicable. They weren't very compatible. My mother's a retired podiatrist and my father was a plumber. I just think dad was very meat and three veg and mum liked to go out to the theatre and do all these things ... so it worked until it didn't work and they called it a day.

**Ollie (female, 24 years)** My life started in Hungary, Budapest. I can't remember much of my past, like, before I was five, but even if I did, it wasn't that good. I remember having good times with my dad, shooting and doing all that, but I can't really remember a lot from being a child. I've been living here [in Australia] from November 1989.

I was living in Balaclava. My dad's still in Balaclava. I've been from Balaclava to the city. [I've always lived] between those lines. I used to live in Toorak as well. That was very good. Everyone didn't mind me. They all knew that my mum's not rich, rich, rich, but they knew that my mother's got money as well.

There is little that distinguishes the above experiences from those of many hundreds of thousands of children in Australia. The lives that the above participants shared with their families are largely unremarkable. Certainly, there were moments that will have had a lasting impact upon their lives - the divorce of one's parents or moving to a different location, for example. Some participants were brought up in disciplined (although not



abusive) households while others lived their childhood against a background of a 'hippie, pot-smoker' lifestyle'. Some were influenced by having been born into religious families, where attendance at Sunday school and church was an accepted part of the routine of family life. There was little related by the above participants to suggest that childhood was a particularly traumatic period in their lives. This stands in contrast to studies that suggest, or sometimes imply, that the majority of sex workers come from broken families and / or have endured an institutional upbringing as wards of the state. The belief that sex workers are the product of childhood abuse, parental neglect and state care this is yet another example of the stereotypes that contribute to inaccurate and misinformed, but widespread, assumptions and beliefs in the general community.

There were cases, amongst those who took part in this project, of disrupted family lives as a consequence of parental neglect. While such disruption and related issues of abandonment (whether a conscious or unconscious influence upon their lives) doubtless had an impact upon the affected young people in their formative years, it does not necessarily follow that they did not enjoy a supportive family upbringing. Lisa, for example, had a particularly disrupted start to life. Born to parents who were heroin dependent, Lisa's earliest memories are of Odyssey House, a detoxification facility in which she spent much of her first year of life. Ultimately, however, her mother's inability to care for Lisa and her willingness to put her daughter into state care forced Lisa's grandmother to become her primary carer. Under her grandmother's care, Lisa led a very 'sheltered' upbringing:

**Lisa (female, 25 years)** I was born in 1979. Mum and dad got married in May and I was born in September, so she was pregnant when they got married. I was brought up in Preston. I grew up with my grandma. I had hassles with the family ... my real mum and dad were both heroin addicts when I was born. I was put straight into Odyssey House for the first 18 months off and on with mum while she was basically cleaning her act up ... or trying to.

Mum wasn't allowed downstairs into the kitchen after 6.00 o'clock. One night she was caught downstairs getting a coffee and she threatened to burn me with the urn. She ended up sticking me under it and turning the tap on 'cause she couldn't get a cup of coffee at six. She must have been going through a pretty hard time. I don't hate her or anything like that ...

By the time I was 22 months, mum had had enough and basically said to my dad's mum: 'Either you take her or I'm gonna put her into a foster home' – she just couldn't handle me. At the age of six, my grandma decided to get sole custody of me and look after me without worrying about my real mum coming and taking me away. I had a very sheltered upbringing. My Nan wrapped me in cotton wool as soon as she had custody of me. I was never allowed to sleep at friends' places as a kid because of the circumstances with my real mum – how she could have come along in the first five years [before my grandmother was granted custody] and just take me away. I think she had a fear of that. I did swimming, sports and stuff, I was always

active, but I wasn't allowed to sleep at friends' places. I was sheltered. I wasn't allowed to go to friends' parties or night-time events ... she was very scared.

During my primary school years, dad was in and out of prison, he was still fighting the drug habit. The final time in prison, he got his act together and stayed clean. From there, he went into alcohol rehabilitation at a place in Coburg. It's closed now. He started doing AA. He ended up being so good at AA that he ended up moving up to a place in Watsonia. It was a rehabilitation [style environment] where people can learn to live in a house again, cook and clean for yourself and do all those kind of things. Dad ended up working there himself.

While many of those taking part in this project knew the warmth and care of a loving family environment, there were certainly others who did not. The lives of some participants, for example, were changed dramatically by a death in the family. For one young girl this meant growing up in a frightening and, at times, hostile, environment.

**Laura (female, 27 years)** Mum passed away when I was nine. Mum died, [*fingers click*], just like that. I think she knew something was wrong. She just didn't tell us 'cause it would worry us ... we were living in Frankston and she said, 'I think I'm going to pass out'. My sister took it as a joke because we'd cleaned the house. 'Oh, the house is clean for a change, I think I'm gonna [*faint*]' you know? But it was for real. She went to have a shower and fell down in the hallway and died of a heart attack. So it was all pretty full on. It was like next morning, 'Pack your things, we're outta here'. We didn't know anything that was going on, so ... I sort of went from [age] nine to 16 overnight.

Laura had a number of siblings but the loss of their mother meant that all were left trying to cope in their own way. Further, the six children were born to two different fathers. Consequently, there was a significant age difference between Laura and Leo, born to one father, and their other four siblings. Laura rarely mentioned her father in our meetings except to say that he was a 'chronic alcoholic'. His absence as a figure in her life became increasingly apparent and was perhaps a factor in her later living arrangements. At this point it is sufficient to state that he played little if any role as a parent following the death of Laura's mother.

**Laura:** I was born in Brisbane, but moved to Melbourne when I was a couple of months. We moved a lot as kids. Mum having the six of us ... amazing, six of us by herself. She stayed at the one job, but we'd always try and find cheaper accommodation. Sometimes you would get run down places and we would fix them up. The idea of getting a run down place was 'cause it was cheap. We'd spend heaps of time fixing it up and all of a sudden they'd boot us out, you know, a woman on her own with six kids, there's some pretty dodgy real estate agents out there that'll take advantage of it.

My mother was married and had four children. Then she got divorced, met my father, never married, but had my brother and I. She raised all six of us by herself because my father was a chronic alcoholic and a bit of a mess.

Mum was a chef. She worked non-stop. It was very rare that we got to see her ... which she hated, but the same time, if she didn't work, she couldn't keep a roof and food [for her family]. Any spare moment she had, she'd devote it to her children. In one way I think she got worked to death because she was just non-stop working. Then in her spare time, she was trying to make up for lost time with her children. Especially with Leo and I 'cause we were younger – the other four were at that age that they were nearly out of home.

I'm the youngest. From the oldest to me there's quite an age gap. I went with my older sister after my mum died. My brother, Leo, the one closest in age to me, he stayed with me most of the time. I stayed with my sister for a year, she'd been married had her first child, the second one on the way, so we went with a foster family for a year. After 12 months, [the foster family] decided that they didn't want two [more] children to go through their teenage years again ... they already had three boys that had gone through the teenage years. I think at first they thought it was a bit of a novelty ... and then the novelty wore off. So after 12 months we went back with my older sister. We just weren't getting along ... I felt she was taking her anger and grief of mum's death out on myself and my brother.

While the circumstances of Laura's life changed with the death of her mother, other participants shared the experience of parental neglect and / or foster care. In some cases, mothers were the primary instigator or at least complicit in the neglect, abuse and / or effective abandonment of their children. There is a wealth of psychological material documenting the undeniable impact of being subject to such treatment at the hands (or mouths) of one's parents. Needless to say, it can be a significant influence of an individual's sense of confidence and self-esteem.

**Mia (female 45 years)** The other night I was thinking back to when I was a kid. I don't remember a lot of it, but when I was, like, 15, 16, my mother always called me a slut and a mole. 'I never wanted a girl, you were supposed to be a boy.' I don't know if all that - 'you're nothing but a slut, a whore and mole' – I don't know if that had anything to do with it [my later life]. I remember when I was 20, I'd go back home and mum would still bring it up. She'd give me this up and down look, like 'you're nothing but a tramp, a mole.' I don't know if it was that, getting drummed into me all the time. I hated my mother. I've been reading in the paper about those society murders, the Wales-King thing. I can really relate to that because I really hated my mother almost to the point where I could have killed her.

Mum died last year. I didn't bat an eyelid. It didn't worry me here or there. I hated her.

**Simone (female 44 years)** [My parents] came [to Australia] when I was born. They came by ship and me and my twin sister were born on the ship seven hours before the port of Melbourne. You can call me the little mermaid. They were old fashioned ... refused to grow with the times. They knew they made my life unbearable, you know, terrible. My mum had me and my twin sister when she

was six and a half months pregnant, and my twin sister died about 30 days later. I was the size of a palm [of a hand] and weighed no heavier than a tub of margarine.

In a way my parents blamed me for my twin sister dying. I remember one time my dad socking me in the face. I flew and hit my head on the wall. He turned around and said the good one died and the bad one lived. So it wasn't much of an upbringing. I always said if I ever had children, I'm going to be completely opposite and I am with me kids.

**Denise (female, 28 years)** I was first brought up with my parents in St Kilda, then I got adopted when I was 19 months. I was officially adopted at eight years old, but I was put in care at 19 months. Why? Because one day my mum packed up and left me and my sister in the house. Packed the rest of the house up and took off. [My father] would work on the railroads so he was never home.

I grew up in like Mulgrave, Roweville, Noble Park. [The adoptive family] moved every year 'cause they were renting all the time to start with, and then they started their own business, and then moved into a caravan for a good fucking six years in Noble Park ... They tried to start their own business, in the recession, or the so-called recession anyway.

[I haven't lived at home] since I was 13. I became a ward of the state. It was the choice of my [adoptive] parents really. They didn't want me in the first place anyway ... it was going to happen. I was a ward of the state until I was 18. We started off in a refuge. Then they try to get you out long term, but mostly you just go around and around and around [to different houses].

Some of the women and men I spoke with remembered a youth spent with relatively little parental supervision. Jem talked about her perception, at the time, of her mother's lack of interest in her children and how this, coupled with her mother's lengthy absences from the family home, led her to leave the security of her family home (and childhood?) at a relatively young age. She did not mention a father figure.

**Jem (female, 30 years)** Mum lived in Ivanhoe, I sort of grew up there, but, like, at the age of 13, 14, I was getting into a lot of trouble, so I was running away from home and all that. So I sort of never stayed around that area ...

I've got a twin sister, we were really close. There was a time when we used to both take off together but back then I was doing my thing and she was, like, trying to be independent 'cause we were twins ... my mum used to dress us exactly as the same, all that shit.

Of course when you run away you're trying to get away as far as possible, so yeah, a lot of time spent away from home over the years, I was here, there, everywhere really.

Mum was great, you know. I can't criticise me mum really. I must admit, mum should have concentrated more on what was going on at home instead of concentrating on working all the time. Like, hey, I understand, you know, you want your kids to have the best of everything, but kids shouldn't have to come home from school to an empty house ... there should be someone there. [I was] coming home from school at the age of 11 to an empty house. I did have an older brother and he was just the bully of the house when mum weren't around. When you're young, you don't want to have to deal with that you know what I mean. Like really, it's not excuse. *Now*, I know it's not an excuse for my behaviour back then, but at the time I thought it was.

So yeah ... we were starting getting involved in drugs, even at 13, and that was really what the running away was about. Just the drugs really. Mum won't let me use dope or anything at home. Any suspicion of me being on drugs was a big thing, so we'd sort of like avoid going home for the drug aspect.

Paxton's childhood was similarly unconstrained by parental influence. He remembers running away from a home in which his father's alcoholism, and his mother's frustrated attempts to cope, led to an overbearing and, at times, physically abusive family life. Running away led him into a community, of sorts, where self-expression was given free reign and a distinctly 'unconventional' outlook was encouraged to emerge. Having just had his first sexual experience and already of an 'artistic temperament', Paxton thrived amidst his new found 'family'.

**Paxton, (cross dresser, 37 years)** I was born in Launceston, Tasmania. I was brought up in South Sydney, New South Wales. My father was a bricklayer and my mother was a housewife. I had a very turbulent childhood and ran away at 13 to Darlinghurst where I fell into a protective little scene of people who lived in squats and took me in.

I was pretty badly bashed by my mum and abused verbally. Mum sent me down to Tasmania for the school holidays to get me out of her hair. When I got back, mum slapped me at the airport straightaway. She was going through a lot of mental shit at the time, completely depressed. My dad was a drinker and when I got back the kids were starting to get hit ...

When I was away in Tassie I had my first homosexual experience. I had grandparents there, I went down to see granny. I was going back to the old park [that I used to visit] when I was a kid ... I hadn't been there since I was a kid. I got jacked off by this old man in a toilet. Coming back [to Sydney], this big lust thing happened. I had had my first orgasm and it was totally horny and fantastic. So to have mum sending me out to this environment, out of her hair, and then to have this homosexual experience down there and my first orgasm was full on. So when I came back to mum being really aggro to the kids I decided to run away from home.

The first day back to school – I only went to high school for first form – it was like second term in first form. I had made this plan to run away and become a Hari Krishna because then I could go to the farm and all I had to do was shave my head and I get fed. So I went to the train station, went straight into the city, and went to the Hari Krishna's. They said, 'No'. Next I went to the Sannyassins, the Orange People, Bahgwan Rajneesh, or whatever his name was. Back then it was huge in Darlinghurst. I knew very limited things but I knew that they were having sex all the time. I was very horny then ... puberty setting in.

Anyway, I was wandering around, dissed from every place I was going to and met this prostitute who befriended me. She was a real mess. We went around the corner to her place, which was a big squat full of like 60 cabaret performers. Back then, like 25 years ago, squats were huge. All I can say is they took me in. I think they persisted [with trying to contact] like a child welfare centre. I called out, 'No, I can't go home' and told the story. That night, they made a big dinner for me, I had 30 people toasting me in their family.

I used to dress in drag to go undercover because my picture was coming through the [Kings] Cross. My mum was looking for me and I had had no contact with my family for about eight months. I wanted her to think I was dead at the time.

I was a trained ballet dancer and tap dancer. I was dancing since I was 4. And in the environment I was in, there were a lot of performers and cabaret acts, bands and stuff like that. I was very young and went into a talent quest to make some money. I won it and started doing drag professionally. I got a job from 13 – they said I was 15 for legal reasons ... it was just this big carnival sort of thing. So I went from being a very, very, very straight young child in a uniform to running away and a few months later, working in a club and doing drag.

Each of these individuals would, at some later stage of their lives, engage in sex work on the streets of St Kilda. Indeed, despite the geographical distances that separated them – Auckland, Brisbane, Darlinghurst, Norfolk Island, suburban Melbourne, regional Victoria and so on – many would come to know each other well. Nonetheless, the insights into their childhood memories, although brief, give no indication of any common experience that might be isolated as a 'predictor' of entry into the commercial sex trade. This stands at odds with research that has sought out such 'predictors' (e.g. childhood sexual abuse). As research addressed in the introductory section of this report suggests, even sexual abuse should not necessarily be considered an influential factor in later involvement in sex work.

Effectively, the above stories encapsulate a variety of experiences from growing up within comfortable middle class and / or religious families; to having emotional supports wrenched from them by the sudden loss of a loving mother; to emotional abandonment, parental neglect and the involvement of child protection services; through to immersion in artistic communities where freedom of expression was paramount. Nobody could point to any two participants who shared similar experiences and argue that a path towards illicit street sex work was already forming.

# I WAS A GOOD STUDENT

STREETWALKING BLUES

- SEX WORK, ST KILDA AND THE STREET

I WAS A GOOD STUDENT



## I WAS A GOOD STUDENT

When one looks to one of the major defining periods of a child's life, the journey through the formal education system, the diversity of participants' personal stories is further underscored. Interestingly, limited schooling was an experience shared by a number of project participants. As Paxton has noted, he ran away from home during the first year of secondary school, the latter all but forgotten as he set about building a new life, and something of an iconic personality, within the underground artistic performance community of inner-Sydney. Tina, in much the same way, left school, and a family life largely defined by a disciplinarian father, to pursue a personal journey of discovery in respect to her sexuality. In both Paxton and Tina's cases, it could be argued that the priority accorded to the personal issues that were to determine their very identity was understandable, particularly given the lack of 'space' allowed to explore these issues in their home environment.

**Tina:** My family was quite accepting, my father was a little bit funny of course ... all dads are like that, but you don't bother about that. The only thing on your mind is what you feel ... that's what matters. That's where you become flamboyant and you go [away from home] anyway. Not that you've been chucked out or anything, it's just [*fingers click*] you want to get out there. If anything, I wasn't explaining [to my parents] enough, because you don't know what's going on yourself. At 16, you've gotta get out there and discover it ... everyone's had different journeys to figure out about yourself. Neela's [*Neela, also a transsexual, is Tina's long time best friend and source of support*] been a very good friend ... like a mother figure since I was 16 and she couldn't even tell me [what I was going through]. She didn't know what was going on until I discovered it. That's how it is, no one shows you.

[I lived with the family] until about 16, but [I was] back and forth 'til about 19 to Melbourne and Sydney with Neela, we travelled a bit. [*Was this show work?*] A bit of both [sex work and show work]. Survival work, whatever we had to do really, in the way of rent, having a roof over our heads, we've always looked after each other in that way.

Jem, Mia, Simone, Ollie, Denise and Riley all spent relatively short periods of time in secondary school. They would be the first to admit that they weren't necessarily model students. Jem, as noted above, was already running away from home and smoking marijuana at an early age. Similarly, Mia placed little emphasis on attending school. Boys, alcohol and an inexplicable attraction to the 'mystique' of illicit drugs were foremost in her mind in her early teenage years. At 13 Mia was formally expelled from high school.

**Mia:** I grew up in Wangaratta. I think I was 13 [when I started going out with guys]. I don't know whether it was living in the country. I often think back to 'what started all this?' A lot of my childhood is blocked. I don't remember a lot of it 'cause I haven't dealt with it, but I remember reading *Go Ask Alice*<sup>14</sup> when I was



12. I remember I just walked into the newsagent and it was sitting on the shelf and, God knows why, what attracted me to it was the drug paraphernalia on the front. I was 12. I used to keep it in a pillowcase [laughing] under me mattress but mum found that... you know what mums are like, snooping around. I read that book, that's something I do remember.

I was 13 when I left school. I got expelled. I think I told the teacher to get fucked. I got expelled halfway through the year I remember because I was making a Christmas cake. I remember I had iced it but I hadn't decorated it. I was shattered ... I remember riding my bike home with my cake in my hand. Shit happened to me at school too. They used to dack me – pull people's pants down. I remember that happened to me once in the playground. This is at high school in Form One. There were these people around and I was in the middle getting dacked by these guys. Shit like that used to happen at school. My parents came up about that. I went and worked with my father in the shop. He had a shop and I went and worked with him until I was about 15 and then I got a job in a supermarket.

I was trouble. I was hanging around pubs when I was 13, 14. My Dad would drop me at the picture theatre – he was pretty well known in the community so he knew everything I was getting up to – he'd drop me at the pictures and I'd nick back around to the pub. I remember coming home at 3 in the morning and they'd be sitting up waiting for me. I'd come in drunk or I wouldn't come home all night. I was a bit of a problem. Not with drugs ... just drinking at that stage. It was all alcohol.

The extent to which Mia's experiences of school were influenced by her mother's emotional abuse is not a question that this report seeks to (or can) answer. However, it is notable that Simone shared a similar experience of abuse in the family home, an experience that she certainly related to her disruptive behaviour while at school.

**Simone:** I went to Williamstown High. I was a bit of a ratbag at school but I did want to finish ... I did want to do nursing. As far [back] as I remember, I remember wanting to be a nurse, but my parents said, 'Only sluts become nurses'. I would have only gone up to fourth form and then become a nurse. They robbed me of that ... I went half way through third form ... I had to leave. My parents said, 'You have to leave to support us'.

When I was in Year 7, Year 8, Year 9, teachers could not handle us. We gave the teachers hell. There were teachers that didn't want to come back to teach us, teachers that we sent out crying. We were ratbags. We were more or less kids that lost focus. Just run amok. Looking back at it now, I think it was more or less to get attention ... Whatever my parents and everybody else said I did the opposite. If I didn't like what I was taught, I'd jump out of the window, halfway

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<sup>14</sup> *Go Ask Alice*, first published in 1972, is the 'actual' diary of a white 15-year-old middle class school girl who uses drugs and eventually loses her life to them.

through class. I just got girlfriends - 'Alright, put my books in your locker, I'm out of here' - and I jumped through the window.

My parents did [find out]. My dad had everybody keeping an eye on me, even my sister and her girlfriends at school, 'cause they went to the same school. Everyday when I came home from school, it was bash, bash, bash. I think that made me retaliate more. At home I wasn't allowed to do anything, but I did retaliate more at school. Even though I was getting bashed, I went for it, like, 'This isn't over...'

Yeah [there were subjects that I liked] and there were teachers that I liked. They said, 'Simone, we know you're going through a rough patch' [but] a lot of the teachers said, 'Why can't you be like your sister?' They always compared me to her. [She was older] by about three years.

Ollie left school at a young age and was married at 16.

**Ollie:** I went to South Yarra Primary and Brighton High. I didn't like South Yarra Primary. Then we moved from there to where the school is [Brighton High]. It was like a five minute walk from my place.

I passed school, passed every year. I didn't have to stay back one year. I passed Grade 4, Grade 5, Grade 6, Grade 7 and Grade 8, that's when I left and become a housewife, I don't know what for. 14 and a half I was. I married him when I was 16, but was with him for five years.

Denise suggests her poor school marks 'disgraced' her adoptive family. Obviously, this is Denise's perception and one that may be attributable to any number of factors. Once within 'the system' as a ward of the state she attended government schools until leaving the formal education system. Denise states that, if she were to have her time over, she would apply herself to her education. This is not an unusual thing to hear from many a member of the broader community. However, the past cannot be changed and Denise certainly did not know her life would unfold the way that it has.

**Denise:** I moved schools because, as my parents thought, I disgraced the family. I wasn't very good at education. I actually don't know why. They just sent me to different schools. St Vesalius, Holy Family ... Silverton. Half of them were church schools and then a few public schools ... most of them were church schools actually ... and then public schools.

[I finished school at] at 15 ... [As a ward of the state] if you didn't go to school you had to look for a job, but you only had to be in the house between certain hours, so you'd do whatever you wanted really. If I knew I was going [to become a sex worker] like this, I would have ... I would have gone to school.

Riley's schooling was cut short by entry to the workforce. However, in Riley's case, the decision to leave was voluntary.

**Riley:** I went to school at Boronia High. I finished Year 9, started Year 10 and that was it. I didn't complete Year 10. I got involved in acting and joined a theatre company in South Yarra. I was constantly travelling into South Yarra on weekends and during the week to rehearse and do the play and then hanging out at these people's houses. I basically ended up moving to the area, moving in with them and getting a job in South Yarra as an apprentice hairdresser, so I quit school.

Laura and Lisa both attended high school until Year 12, achieving a good to high standard of grades. However, both found their lives during their final school years influenced by work commitments, friends and, increasingly, causal drug use. A combination of these factors eventually led to both leaving high school prior to completion. As Laura remembers:

**Laura:** I was going to school in Essendon. A friend of mine tried out for the Melbourne Girls [High School] scholarship. I tried out ... only because I didn't want my best friend to leave the [same] school. I thought, well if she's going to go, I'll try it out and hopefully we both go. Or if we don't get in, we both stay in school in Essendon 'cause we were very close friends. Unfortunately I got in and she didn't, and because of the pressure of my brothers and sisters, 'Oh, mum would be so proud', I felt compelled to go. I was pretty unhappy at that school. I did Year 9 and Year 10 there, and then I went to TAFE, and finished off the rest.

When I was 13, I moved out by myself. I was working at St Kilda McDonald's. I lied about my age. I was still going to Melbourne Girls and working at *McDonald's*. I found a cheap house that had a couple of bedrooms. There was a few people at *McDonald's* that said, 'Oh, I'll move in'. Originally I was going to move out by myself but when they said they'll move in [it became a few of us]. The place, we found out later, was due for demolition but obviously they thought they'd stick in the paper one more time to see if they could get a sucker to take it. But we were all young and it was a place to live.

It slowly started off, you know, smoking chuff, taking a bit of acid – that was about it. I was still going to school but I was finding it very hard 'cause I was working from 11.00 at night till 7.00 in the morning, graveyard shifts, and then going straight from work to school. I left school halfway through Year 12. I was 17.

I want to do marine biology. I thought if I'm going to do it, I want to excel and get good grades. Because of the hours I was working – some days I was going to school pretty much half asleep in class – I thought there's no point me spending another six months and not getting the grades that I need to get in. So I left and worked at *Prince of Wales*. I met a group of guys there who lived on Grey Street and they started inviting me back to their place ... a bit of a party house.

For Lisa, despite, or maybe because of, her grandmother's attempts to keep her 'in cotton wool', her retrospective accounts suggest a desire to push through her sheltered

upbringing and discover just what she may have been missing. At the same time, she was being actively discouraged from pursuing areas of interest by, perhaps misguided, teaching staff:

**Lisa:** [My school friends] to this day are all clean. They're all working. If I'd stuck with them and not gone off with the older boyfriend I probably would have been OK, but I was getting itchy feet.

I always enjoyed graphics at school. I was a good student in graphics but in Year 11 my teacher said that graphics was a very fast paced job, very demanding and very stressful. He said to me that I wouldn't be able to cope which basically put me off doing graphic design. Unfortunately if the teachers didn't put me down like that I would have tried to see what it was all about.

I was a pretty average C student. I'd pass, but I wasn't an A+ student or anything like that. But when it came to graphic design it was different. It was before computers and the internet when I was doing VCE, so it was just pen and paper at the table but it was really good. I enjoyed it. It was one of those classes where you're not looking at your watch every five minutes waiting for the bell. By Year 12, I started playing up. I got bored of school basically and [began] not attending, things like that. I started smoking pot the year before, that probably had a bit to do with it ... halfway through Year 12 I left.

When I was starting to stuff up in later high school years, I started getting into that scene of going to friends' parties on the weekends, drinking, smoking bongos, sitting in the cubby. The lights out and glow stickers [on the walls], just tripping out. And then, you get sick of that and you want to move on to something else.

Further discussing her drift into casual drug use, Lisa made an observation at odds with much of the research. In her experience, she had found that it was those young people from 'good' backgrounds who were more likely to become involved in drug use and associated behaviours, a consequence of not knowing how tough or demanding life can be. Without this grounding in hardship, she suggests that she, and others, lacked the desire to improve their current situation, sheltered as this was:

**Lisa:** I find that a lot of people that were very involved in things like sports ended up stuffing up as well. I find that more people that had a pretty bad upbringing decided that they don't want to live like the way their family have lived ... So they'll make the best of their situation. I think, in a sense, because I was so isolated from that [troubled] environment when I first approached it, it was like, 'wow'! It was different. I can't explain the feeling. I felt like I was out on my own, doing things in life without nanna ... it's hard to explain that.

Emily remained at school until the end of Year 12. Attending Catholic private schools in both Melbourne and Bendigo, depending on where she was living, she excelled at sports but had lost interest in her studies by the end of Year 11.

**Emily:** I went to school at Avila College [in Melbourne] and Catholic College [in Bendigo]. Private [schools]. They were all Catholic. You probably find lots of [working] girls are Catholic. Maybe it's straining at the leash. Then when you're 17,18, you just go, bang, to the action.

When I was a little girl we did communion, confession. I'd go through stages where I was going to be the perfect kid and I'd do the prayer at night for three days and then it would go to shit. I wasn't dogmatic. I was a kid of the 70s and you were taught Darwinism. We were basically told that the first testament, that's just stories, you know, but the second testament really happened. So the Adam and Eve concept was just a story. I went to Church till I was about 14, 15. Mum just thought it was something you did. I never felt it was rammed down my throat. Occasionally the family goes on Christmas Eve for midnight mass. I know a lot of people have Catholic shit [hang-ups], but I can remember it quite fondly. [Now] I think you can have spirituality just being an okay person and doing what you think is right. I can feel when I'm not acting honestly. It just doesn't sit with me.

I didn't hate school. I scraped through without doing anything. Cs and Ds. If I had put the effort in ... I'm at school [TAFE] now getting HDs [High Distinctions] 'cause I actually do the work. I think I actually failed Year 7 at Avila and then I changed schools. At private school they don't tend to fail you, it doesn't look good on the books...

I bombed out in Maths ... I lost the Maths thing early. [I was better at] writing, English, English Lit. I bluffed my way through. I'd read the back cover of a book and manage to get a C minus ... [I had] an academic mother who read a lot and probably would do a lot of homework for me. She probably did too much to make me responsible [for my own work]. But I wasn't a ratbag ... I've never been suspended.

I was Sports Captain in Year 12. I did everything [sports wise] but excelled in athletics. I played local sports. Mum really encouraged that. I've got a diary from Year 9 ... I was at athletics training two afternoons a week, squash training. We used to get sent off to Melbourne to [athletics] meets ... we'd have meets at Olympic Park. In about Year 9, Year 10, I went to this sports meet and in the hundred metre hurdles final I breezed through and won. I remember feeling so high, having my name read out on the PA. Then I had to do long jump and got a first in that, just like everything I went in. Then the next year, I was so rattled. There was a lot of pressure because I didn't feel like I could win anymore. I'd just be thrown in and be elected Sports Captain, 'cause I had a history. I actually hurt my back a little bit doing the high jump in practice and had to go a physio. I was over it, but I remember getting the physio to write me a letter so I didn't have to go in the event for next year because I couldn't handle the pressure.

About Year 11, I started smoking cigarettes and sneaking out, having alcohol. I was a natural athlete whereas [other] people used to really train ... and then they started passing me. Instead of coming first, suddenly I was coming third and fourth. A defeatist attitude took over, 'If I'm not gonna win, I'm not gonna play'. So I stopped ... like half way through Year 12 I just went, 'Stuff this' and I gave up any kind of sport.

I did VCE but I failed. I wanted to leave at the end of Year 11, but mum thought I needed another year at school to mature, so I just kind of pissed-arsed around and failed. It was no big deal [at home]. [Did I think about the future?] No, that was tomorrow-land. I very much lived for short-term pleasure, bugger long-term happiness kind of mentality. Being the youngest everyone pandered to me, so I was spoilt. Not neglected but spoilt rotten.

Some of those I spoke to, such as Janine, completed Year 12 and went on to legitimate employment. In Janine's case, it was working with a local electrical goods company for a number of years, a position she combined with accounting studies at TAFE. Simon also completed his secondary schooling and was awarded his first choice of university place. However, 'other interests' were now fully occupying his time. It is worth noting that, despite the apparent ease with which he now dismisses the experience, Simon was the subject of taunts about his sexuality.

**Simon:** School was cool. By the time I was 14, they were trying to harass me, you know. Those who didn't think I was gay decided to say I was anyway. It didn't bother me 'cause I was. I used to get little jibes and get called things and that sort of shit, but nothing serious.

When I started to get too camp and I started drinking and smoking too much pot, my dad thought boarding school in Sydney was a good idea. [Dad's thinking was] that a bit more discipline and structured shit in my life would be better because I was just getting kind of extreme in my own way. I started working part time in a restaurant ... We'd start drinking vodka at work and carry on.

I was awarded a scholarship to Hurlstone Agricultural High. Hurlstone's a boarding school that all the rich farmers send all their kids to. They had a selective entry. I was one of only, like, three people who never did Ag[riculture] for the HSC at this Ag School. I did HSC there.

Of course when everyone else did, I submitted my [applications for] uni courses. I actually got into all the ones I wanted [but] I decided to defer for a year back in 1995. I got accepted into UTS [University of Technology Sydney], but I didn't turn up for the orientation day or whatever they do. I didn't turn up for that and then I didn't turn up for the enrolment date. It was computer drafting, surveying and land management. Yeah, coming up nine [years of deferral] so I don't think I'm going to get there. If I'd been one of them geeks now I'd probably be earning 60 grand a year. [Life is] hard and horrible sometimes, but I wouldn't change nothing I've done. There are a few little things that I would prefer not to have done but, hmm, anyway.

Althea not only successfully completed her secondary schooling but attained a scholarship to further her tertiary studies at university in the United States.<sup>15</sup>

**Althea** I went to Catholic schools. My primary school was in Auckland, obviously ... Over here I went to Genazanno College in Kew.

I started at Melbourne Uni when I was 18 and then found out I had won a scholarship in the States. A lecturer at Melbourne [University] informed me of it and I applied ... I think I was the third international student to get this scholarship. I didn't have to work. I got a temporary Green Card for the three years I was studying. I got scholarship income for my studies, my tuition, and my accommodation on campus – If I wanted to live off-campus, I had to pay that myself – and a small amount for books. It didn't really cover a lot, but it was cool.

I did Science. I did my degree over in the States, and then came back to Melbourne and did my honours year.

Eight of the fourteen contributors to this report left school at a relatively early age. However, they did so for a variety of reasons. The decisions of Paxton, Mia and Simone were influenced, in part, by the verbal, physical and emotional abuse they were subject to in the family home. In the cases of Riley and Ollie, employment and a personal relationship were, respectively, the dominant factor in their decision to leave school. Tina, in contrast, needed the space to 'find herself', arguably a greater priority at that stage of her life. While leaving school at a relatively young age may have been a common experience shared by these participants, the reasons for doing so were quite obviously not.

Some participants in the project, such as Lisa and Emily, simply lost interest and 'piss-arsed' around. Both of these women recall feeling a need to find some degree of independence, Lisa referring to her sheltered life 'in cotton wool' with her grandmother and Emily to 'straining at the leash' within the discipline of the Catholic school system. In both of these cases, drugs played a role in establishing an identity far removed from the constraints of what they perceived to have been somewhat cloistered lives. The influence of friends and drug use was at least partially responsible for Laura's choice to delay schooling until she felt better able to focus on acquiring the marks needed to pursue her desired course of tertiary study.

Limited educational opportunity and / or achievement, is a stereotype often associated with illicit sex workers. However, the range of experiences reported above does not suggest that participants' level of educational attainment was to play a significant role in later 'careers' as street sex workers. Indeed, according to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, the Year 12 completion rate throughout Australia was 67 per cent in 2000, demonstrating that early school leaving is relatively widespread.<sup>16</sup> Further,

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<sup>15</sup> Although she was the only participant to have completed tertiary studies, Mia and Emily were both in the process of completing courses at TAFE during the time we were meeting.

<sup>16</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, (2003) *Australia's Young People: Their health and wellbeing*, AIHW, Canberra.

some participants achieved a significant degree of education achievement, successfully completing studies. In two cases, places were awarded places university and in one of these cases, the woman in question was awarded a rare and coveted educational scholarship to study in the United States. Although looking at her current lifestyle as a street sex worker caused Denise to express some regret about her limited schooling, there was still little indication that any of the participants were engaging in activities that would lead them to the streets of St Kilda. There was, however, one exception. Simon's 'other interests' occupied most of his time outside of Hurlstone Agricultural College. These interests included the 'gay scene' and, before long, commercial sexual activity:

**Simon:** I had an interest in the gay scene, being young, experimenting, that kind of thing. Hanging around in Oxford Street ... and being an extrovert person, I made friends with the kids around me. And then they'd run off and come back with a hundred bucks in the pocket. I can't even remember the first time [engaging in sex work] how it happened. I would have been 15. I started when I went to boarding school. I used to get weekend leave. In Year 12 you're allowed as much leave you wanted, as long as you had a place to go. In Year 11 you were allowed one free weekend a month and one booked weekend a month. Otherwise, you could make up some bullshit that someone was dead or something special was on and you end up getting nearly every weekend off.

I was working the wall at 16, yeah. It's in between the Cross and Oxford Street. Darlinghurst, is where 'the wall' is. I remember being scared, not a lot, but a few times.



# WE WENT OUT CLUBBING AND STUFF

STREETWALKING BLUES

- SEX WORK, ST KILDA AND THE STREET

WE WENT OUT CLUBBING AND STUFF



## WE WENT OUT CLUBBING AND STUFF

During the years through which they were, or could be, attending secondary school, a number of the individuals who contributed to this research were beginning to discover themselves as independent young people. The circles of friends and associates they moved between began to exert a stronger influence over their lives than either family or school. In contrast, the families of other contributors would determine the 'pathways' they would follow. For these individuals, choice was rarely available and independence largely unknown (unless it was thrust upon them as an unwanted experience for which they were ill-prepared).

In between her completion of secondary school and commencing tertiary studies, Althea's father took early retirement so that he and his wife could return to Melbourne from interstate. Althea and her older siblings had remained in Melbourne when their parents' had moved interstate and this was perceived to be the primary reason for her father's retirement and return, Althea noting that her parents were missing their children and 'stuff'. The 'stuff' that she did not immediately elaborate on included 'worrying about their daughter'. Althea had been introduced to intravenous amphetamine use through friends she had met at a Catholic youth group – full of young people 'straining at the leash' perhaps? Althea's parents became aware of her drug use when her family doctor received the results of a blood test confirming that she had contracted hepatitis B. The doctor subsequently took it upon himself to inform her parents of the cause of this infection – without Althea's consent.

**Althea:** [I got introduced to drugs through] my friends. I didn't mix with any Genazanno girls at all. Out of school, I mixed with the local youth group [at] the Catholic Church every Friday night. I went along there and met friends – Liz and Maria. I was associating with them as opposed to the girls from school. We went out night clubbing and stuff.

[My parents] found out I was using. I got Hepatitis B when I was 18 from speed, using needles, and that freaked my dad out.

I'd just quit my job ... I was doing part time reception [work] and I was bored with it. I woke up feeling really nauseous and I had to go to Social Security in St Kilda to put my first dole form in. I remember waiting in the line and standing there feeling really queasy and rocking on the spot. I turned around to the lady behind and said, 'I don't feel very well, do you think you could mind my spot? I'll just go to the toilet and back'. 'No, you walk away from the spot, you don't get it back again'. There's like five million people behind me ... I was lucky – right at the head of the line was this pot plant, beautiful plastic tree, and I just got to the top of the line and, woohhhh, [vomited] into the tree ... So they hurried me through. In and out there in no time, funnily enough ... On my way home, I stopped and rung my parents

and they said that [my friend] Jane had rung and it was important that I rang her. She found out she had Hepatitis but didn't know if it was A or B. If you've got A, you've got to tell everyone so they can get inoculations ... So she told me, 'You've got to go to the doctor and get Hep A shot'.

I got home 2.00 in the afternoon. Mum was home, dad wasn't. I told mum, 'Jane's got Hepatitis, so we've got to go up to the doctor and get Hep A shots'. So she made an appointment and drove me straight to the local doctor. I spoke to him first and said I was feeling nauseous and probably had the flu. He said, 'Well, people think they've got the flu'. He didn't give me a shot. Instead he took a blood test.

I spent the next couple of days in bed and close to home because I wasn't well at all. About two days later the doctor came over after work, which was really odd, the house call. I was sound asleep and I woke up to my mum and my dad holding my hands. The doctor had rung and said, 'Is it alright if I come over when the surgery closes?' So dad got home a bit earlier than usual and I woke up to mum holding one hand and dad holding the other ... I woke up to my hands feeling warm and wet 'cause they were both crying. This prick of a doctor had arrived and said, 'Your daughter is a junkie... she's using needles, she's got Hep B' ... the cupboard doors were open and they've gone through my wardrobe, my clothes and bags. The doctor had suggested they do that.

Althea applied herself at university and refrained from using drugs to the degree that she was able to nurse herself back to good health. Her parents' understandable concern was somewhat eased by her physical improvement, her application to her studies and the news that she had received a scholarship to further them in the US.

**Althea:** It took me three months to get through the illness ... from the contagious bit through the yellow [skin pallor]. After three months, my energy was back ... It was early New Year [when I contracted hepatitis] and by the time I started uni [in March], I was feeling better. I was going three days a week or four days ... By the time I was over it, I was quitting anyway [to take up a scholarship in the US] ... my dad went to counsellors and they suggested, 'She keeps up a straight life as much as possible' – Yeah, good luck with that one. But it was fine. [My parents] were good by the end of it 'cause I was really healthy. I was doing plenty of stuff and wasn't using.

I had a bit of coke [cocaine] in the States. I was going out with this guy for two years and it took about a year and a half before I discovered that he was a coke dealer. I wondered why, every weekend when we would go out, there's always coke to be had. You know, 'You don't have a job or anything, how can you afford this?' I thought I'd put in [money] for it but 'No, no, you don't need to'. Well, of course I didn't need to ... I didn't have a habit or anything. I freebased it a couple of times. Actually it's pretty good like that – he didn't want me to get into that, you know, 'snorting is bad enough, I don't want you getting into freebasing because you'll like it too much'. It was rather intoxicating ... I came back here and found

it really easy to give up cocaine. It's so crappy here, like speed with a little extra. People say, 'Oh, it's the best coke, it's the best coke', and it was like a little bit of a buzz, but that's it.

I had a bit of time between the end of the [US] university year and [Australia's] uni [year], so I toured around America with friends. We hired a car, a big Chevrolet Impala, this big huge tank. There were six of us and we all slept inside, unless it was warm.

When I can back to Melbourne, I did a little bit of modelling, a lot of friends were designers early in their careers, and they couldn't afford models, so they'd get friends to model for them. And I was dancing ... I was a [television program] dancer for a couple of years. [Over] different years they had different formats. They'd have a little story line ... a really deep plot to go with it, like you know, if it was a sad love song you know, we'd be like, boo-hoo, sad dancing, with sappy faces, and if it's a happy love song, we'd be dancing with smiles on our faces. There was no drugs then because I was really active. It was great, I was getting 200 bucks a week, which was like wild money. We film on a Friday, say half a day or a day, depending on how many clips I might be in. I'd have one, sometimes two, rehearsals during the week and that was it. It was like easy money, good money.

As the youngest of three girls, Emily was much influenced by her sisters, particularly having emerged from what she had found a disciplinarian catholic school system. As she explained, her sisters were born during her mother's first marriage and there was a six-year gap between herself and the younger of her two sisters. By the time Emily had endured her final (academically) unsuccessful year at school her sisters were already using 'hard' drugs. In addition to the influence of her sisters, Emily's post-school years were affected by the birth of her daughter when Emily was 19. In the years to come, she would later watch the social lives of her friends 'blossom' as she devoted, or was compelled to devote, her time to her role as a mother. This would contribute to Emily's feelings of having 'missed out' of the social life of her friends and the driving desire to 'catch up' on the experiences that she had missed.

**Emily:** Kate and Lauren, my two sisters had my mum for six years to themselves. I think Kate was old enough [to understand] when her father left. She was about three or four and as he was leaving, packing the car, she went running to him and he told her to go away. My mother can pinpoint times in our lives where something changed in our thinking and she said that was like the first [time Kate was affected by something to this extent]. Kate is all or nothing. If she gets rejected it's, 'Fuck you'.

Then my father came along and I think Kate didn't like the disruption. It was like, 'We'll keep the baby but get rid of the guy, mum'. It's funny – the day that dad had his accident ... an outdoor pool just been delivered and they're waiting for him to come home and put it up, and then he had his accident. Mum came in and said,

'Kevin's in hospital, he's had a bad accident', and Kate turned around and said, 'Does that mean the pool is not going up?'

Dad died about when I was 27. He was 57. Stomach cancer. No [it didn't have much of an impact on my life]. Mum and him had divorced when I was 14 and he got a job up in Queensland. I had cards and phone contact. I probably saw him about six times between the age of 14 and 27. He came down when my daughter was born. It was more geographical distance [than a poor relationship]. I don't think he made a lot of money. I don't think he ever went back into strict plumbing. I think he did roofing and worked for factories like the handyman. He remarried. I went up and stayed with them when I was 18 for about three weeks. It was OK; he was a pretty easygoing guy. He actually sat down and told me that he shouldn't have had children. I remember at the time I was really insulted. Then I realised he was saying that he probably wasn't the best father in the world.

I failed school and moved to Melbourne when I was 17. Basically my sisters were already here and entrenched in the drug culture. They weren't living together but they were both living in St Kilda. I came down at 17, nearly 18, and got a job at the *Village Belle Hotel*. I didn't use heroin till I was 23. I saw powders and heroin as *the* bad drugs, but I was drinking and smoking marijuana like it was going out of fashion. You know, the first time I picked up a cigarette, I was smoking.

I had my daughter at 19, nearly 20, and I wouldn't drink or go out. But she would go to her father's house every second weekend, and, like, I had to make up for lost time, that feeling that I was always missing out. The kid, I mean I love her to death, but back then, she was cramping my style. Kate had moved up to the south coast of New South Wales. [My daughter] was about three and Kate said, 'Come up and I'll help you'. It's really nice up here. There's lots of hippies and everyone's got children'. So I went up there and she was as drugged fucked as ever.

In stark contrast, Mia's path was set, in large part, as a consequence of her estrangement from her family. The emotional abuse she subjected to during her teenage years did not abate and when she fell pregnant she was 'kicked out' of home. Following her expulsion from school and then from home, Mia found herself with her sister, briefly, before moving into a small flat in Melbourne's inner south-east. Once her son was born, 'life started':

**Mia:** I fell pregnant at 16. [The baby's father] was a lot older than me. I told him I was pregnant and he said, 'I don't want to know'. 'OK, fine, that's all I need to know'. My parents kicked me out of home and I came to Melbourne. My dad dropped me off in Preston ... My sister was living there, at this place in Preston with her husband. She married a black guy, so [my parents] shunned her as well. That's how I landed in Melbourne, 16 and pregnant. I lived with my sister for a while and then I moved into my own flat and had my son.

[*How did you get on with your Dad?*] Oh great, yeah, fantastic. He used to send me money and write to me and come down. Mum didn't know anything about it. He passed away 13 year ago. I kept in touch with my mother mainly for money really. I used to go home Christmas, that was it. I'd always ring her for money. She'd give it to me too but then there were times she wouldn't.

[My sister and me] we've never been close. We don't send card for Christmas, nothing. I don't even ring her. Even growing up we weren't close, we're pretty much miles apart. I don't see much of her at all. Even when my mum died.

I was 17 when I had my son ... and, yeah, my life started. I rented a little flat, paying 32 dollars a week. For the first 12 months, I didn't really know anybody, I just stuck to meself as a mum. Then when he was about 12 months old, I put him into a crèche in and I went and worked at *Walton's* at Chapel Street. And from starting work you know, people going out for drinks at night. Everyone used to rage in St Kilda down at the Lower Esplanade at *Mickey's* and *Hillier's* and all that so that's where it all started. I met a girl that was working in a brothel.

56 } Simone, like Mia and, to a lesser extent, Emily, found herself restricted by her responsibilities as a parent without having enjoyed the 'freedom' of youth. Simone's life was such that any amount of independence was unimaginable. Simone was in an arranged marriage and pregnant with her first child at 18 years of age. This was the first of two unhappy marriages and Simone's continued confinement in an oppressive environment would contribute to a number of suicide attempts and recurring mental ill health in the wake of a nervous breakdown

**Simone:** [I had] an arranged marriage when I was 18... quite a few years ago. It was arranged in that, years beforehand. I don't know how it worked, but he was more or less introduced to me like 'he's the one that you have to marry'. I never really had no life. I went from school/home, to work/home, then married very young and had my first daughter when I was 19, separated when I was 20, divorced when I was 21.

After I had my oldest daughter, [my husband] wouldn't let me go on contraception. [My daughter] was two months old and I fell pregnant again and by then I was convinced, I'm going to leave him. I've got a baby in my belly and I'm going to leave the bastard, if I can say that ... He forced me to have an abortion. I can remember my daughter being two months old with him in the waiting room when I had the abortion. I remember crying, asking what [sex] the baby was. Still to this day, it's like he robbed a part of my life, my baby, and to this day, it does torture me a bit. It does play on my mind.

Now I do [see my ex-husband a bit] because my daughter's getting married. Other than that ... no way. A couple of years ago he said to my daughter, 'I'm sorry for the way I treated your mum, it's wrong the way I treated her'. I said, 'Well, if he had treated me differently, we could have been happily married'. I said, '... well

now I can call him a man [for apologising]'. I will never forgive him for making me have an abortion 'cause I know I would have had a son and he robbed me of that. I forgive him in certain ways, but I will never forgive him for that.

I met my second ex husband ... he was a prince charming that turned into a frog. I had to put up with him playing up behind my back with my girlfriends for 20 years. I met him when I was 22 and got married when I was 30. I stayed with him because I loved him... 'He'll change'. We hit it off and lived with each other for about eight years and had my second daughter. In a way I didn't want to have my second daughter, but in a way I had her, like [for the reason of], 'It's gonna change him as a person'. It did for a while, but then he went back to his old ways.

We got married two days before I turned 30. [My second husband started becoming abusive] around the time I was about 30 years of age. I left him when I was 42. Ten years physical and mental abuse. There were times where I'm virtually [choking] ... he's strangling me and belting me. My [other] daughter's father too, the arranged marriage. He used to drag me around the floor and bash me. I grew up in that kind of life. I was very young [when my father began hitting me].

Through two unfulfilling marriages, Simone pursued a working life in legitimate employment. It is not surprising that, given her early aspirations to become a nurse, she particularly 'loved' her period of employment as a carer. However, the absence of counselling, care or even support in dealing with what had been a restricted and abusive upbringing and then two emotionally and physically abusive marriages was to eventually take its toll.

**Simone:** I was working, yeah. I was a jack-of-all-trades. I did everything from sweeping floors, cleaning toilets to pizza making. My last job that I got about seven years ago was a personal carer ... looking after people with MS, older people in nursing homes with Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease, paralysed people. I loved it. It was a form of being a nurse ... I really loved it. I did that for about five years. I first worked for Catholic Family Services and worked in a supporting house [and] looked after 3 autistic children. They were my little babies.

No, [I don't work anymore]. I found out when I was about 32 that I suffered post-natal depression when I had my oldest daughter [at the age of 19]. When I was 32, my ex-husband, my second one, sent me fruit-loopy. I've been in and out of psychiatric hospitals and tried to commit suicide all these times. The work got too much for me, and the doctor said, 'No, you can no longer work'. That was about six years ago. I never knew why I was feeling so nervy, why I was aggressive. Up until one day ... my ex-husband just sent me fruit-loopy, bang, major nervous breakdown.

During her second marriage, Simone increasingly sought refuge in alcohol.

I was a classic alcoholic [in the latter part of my second marriage]. I just drank and drank and drank to get away from this shit life, you know, black out for a while. At one stage I was an everyday drinker. Just beer. I just drank it and drank it and

drank it until I didn't even remember going to bed. That was my way of forgetting about life for one day. Until one day I woke up and said, 'What are you doing? He's laughing at you'. And I stopped.

A major nervous breakdown, periods of hospitalisation for mental illness and a number of suicide attempts, dating back to her youth, attest to Simone's constant struggle against emotional and physical abuse at the hands of her family. Simone's first suicide attempt was at age 15 as a response to a family life in which she was starved of affection, independence and appreciation.

The first time I was about 15. I came home from work one day – my first job was working with my mum at Bonds weaving mills. She took my pay pack every week and I was only allowed \$10. It was just shit. I had to go to work and come home, work and come home and do nothing. My two sisters and brothers, they were allowed to do everything. I remember I came home, looked in all the cupboards, got every single tablet I could find in the house, I didn't care what it was and I just [swallowed them]. The next day I was sick as a dog. I [still] went to work. My mum woke me up and said, 'Oh, are you sick?' I said, 'No, I'm going to work'. About two hours down the track, I said, 'I've got to go home'. I think I slept it out for another two days. [*What was behind the attempt?*] It was the way my parents were.

Simone's second attempt took place in the shadow of her abortion and an experience of rape at the hands of a neighbour.

[The second happened after] I had to get married and [my first husband] made me have the abortion. After I left him, my mum's next-door neighbour raped me one morning with [my oldest daughter] sleeping in the bedroom. As soon as he left, I remember just downing calamine lotion. I threw it up but I kept downing it ... or trying to. Ever since that, it's been spontaneous. I've got scars in me arms ... There were about three times that I literally died in the hospital. When I woke up in emergency and they told me I literally died, I said, 'Why did you bring me back here?' That was my only escape, getting away from this life.

[I'd use] pills, yeah. They use to give me the tablets for a month or two months. I used to be on five, six different tablets a day and when they give someone a month's supply, you know, we hide it pretty good. Then you just get to a stage where life is shit [and you take the lot].

At a later age I was going in and out of psych hospitals in Footscray and then Sunshine. [I'd go in for] quite a few weeks at a time. At one stage it got to me being home for one day, in hospital for three, four weeks. One time, I don't even remember getting there... I had a massive nervous breakdown and I was [in hospital] for about three, four months. They pumped me with so much medication and I ended up having six months off work. Most of the times [in psychiatric hospitals] it would have been involuntary. At one stage they were my second home from about 32 years of age up until I was about 40... about eight years.



It was only once she left her husband and sought refuge in St Kilda that Simone was finally able to find a sense of peace and, most importantly, a sense of acceptance and belonging. Ironically, it was at this point that she was introduced to sex work

You can more or less say I had a shit life up until three, four years ago when I moved here.

Tina's narrative in the preceding chapter saw her leave school as part of her struggle to determine her identity. Obviously a difficult time, Tina remembers a journey of discovery that took many years to complete. However, at the completion of this journey, Tina had reached her own understanding of transsexual issues. Discussing the methodology of any project dealing with issues of transsexualism, she observed:

**Tina:** It's got to be done nicely – to show what a true transsexual is. They're actually born, they're like this at six years old, eight years old, it's not just a 'thing'. You don't have a choice. Because if you did, you wouldn't pick it. Every day, you've got to walk out there [in the community]. It's hard but it's worth every bit of it because you can't help your feelings.

Every day you get contradicted. The straight people out there, one thing I'd like [them] to do – hop in our shoes for a week. Be judged every day for a week and tell me you're not going to have a pissed off attitude at least once a week, you know? Hop in our shoes and see how you feel – Then you'll know what [being] strong is about.

It takes a lot of courage to walk away from a lot of situations that we walk away from ... Sometimes it's said nastily, 'that's a fucking bloke' and you've just got to walk past that. There's some days when they'll get you on the wrong day and you just want to pick up something, you do, you just rage.

You've got to be used to being looked at every day and you do get looked at. You don't get sprung [as a transsexual] or anything like that every day. You know when you have been. You can just tell by the person's face ... we're very good with judging. It's usually pretty well all good. You have boys asking you [about yourself] and you don't tell them anything [about your transsexualism] because why should you? It's not like everyday you have to go, oh look, before we start and you go any further I'm transsexual how do you feel about that? That's none of their business.

One gets the impression from Tina that life as a transsexual has been a constant struggle for the acceptance of others. Obviously, however, the journey from being born in the body of a man to accepting one's transsexualism is a journey that would demand an admirable and rare sense of courage. Indeed, often having achieved self-acceptance of one's identity, transsexuals then face the issue of whether their physical body sits comfortably with their personal identity.

I've never been to a doctor to be analysed. A lot of my girlfriends have been the same – we don't need a doctor to tell us what we know inside ... you know at a very young age. From day one, you've got to be strong. [I was unsure about myself] from about 16. [My family] were great, my sister, my mum, my dad ... my dad wasn't for the first four years but that was more [due to] me not explaining enough.

I've got girlfriends that have gone under surgery. I've only had my boobs done in that way. That was about \$6,000. I would have more [surgery] but it's got to the stage where money has to be used more wisely. You can save for it, you can work for it, but I don't have the strength for that. At the same time, you've got to think of rent, bills, living – all of that.

I started doing the change when I was about 20 – you're umming and aahing – one day you want to and one day you don't because you don't have the confidence. Then, all of a sudden, bang, you just think you've got to deal with that choice, no one else can tell you.

I was 22 [when I had my breasts done] Yes [it was a happy day] ... Once you've got them in, that's it. You wake up and you've got them and it's fabulous and then you just forget about them. That's just the part that you go through. People forget, being a transsexual, you are born with the feelings.

In contrast to the personal resources that Tina drew upon, Paxton's immersion in a free-thinking and artistic collective provided the necessary freedom, coupled with the emotional support, to embark on a lifestyle that was far from conventional. Although living with prostitutes, and having an active sex life at a young age, Paxton did not take part in prostitution, with one slightly 'innocent' exception.

**Paxton:** Everyone sheltered and looked after me. It wasn't like I was having sex and drugging, no way could I do that. I just had these amazing people look after me. I wasn't allowed to go to the club [where they worked]. I wasn't allowed to take drugs. They looked after me as far as [telling me] 'don't go to the Cross'. In Oxford Street, it's like one step away [to Kings Cross] but people don't think [like] that. It's a cliché, runaway to the Cross, uncontrollable children, lost kids. And so I never went to the Cross. I grew up in Darlington, no one found me.

Once I got the job at *Patches*, the nightclub, and they found out how young I was they looked after me as well. There were no questions asked ... basically I think 'cause I was talented. It was probably four months into me running away that I got into the *Patches* talent quest and then eight months after that, I got a gig. The world was a bit different back then too. Much more bohemian and it was an inner city vibe, not what it is now. This was '81/'82. I always had prostitution around me ... and drugs. It was a drug culture. It wasn't like drug habits but everyone had everything. I mean back in those days the pills were very big. Mandrax, Quaaludes – these things aren't made anymore. Smack was sort of shunned, but I was

around people that were from the 70s, ten years before me, like everyone was like old, they were 20 and 30. I was 13, so their history started ten years before me. The smack had already been done, their smack era.

It was like living in a circus basically, full of carnies and stuff. In that [scene], a girl's just got to do ... or a boy's just got to do what they got to do and that's prostituting, just walking down the street, picking up. There wasn't parlours 'cause that was illegal in those days. There were hardcore junkies and hardcore whores, but that was the Cross, and that was sleazy. Where I was people whored and took drugs but it was part of a lifestyle. They were outrageous. They dressed up all the time and they lived this big fantasy life. There was definitely the straight world ... and then there's the underground and then there was us, you know, the cool people. I think, looking back, I legitimised it, being a kid.

I never did prostitution as a kid. I did once with a Greek guy, just by chance, but I thought I was cruising him more. He was an old man and it was for pork chops and \$15 because I wanted cigarettes for my friends because I wasn't working at the squat. They scolded, 'Don't you ever do that again because if you get found ...'

The 'outrageous' lifestyle that was legitimised in Paxton's young mind left a lasting, and valuable, impression. Nonetheless, he has a highly developed and strongly held set of beliefs and convictions and while his views doubtless appear unconventional to many, they could not be considered immoral or ill-considered.

By the time I saw mum, I had befriended a youth worker. She actually picked me up. [She] thought I was a girl. She was bisexual and I went to bed with her. She didn't know I was a boy. When I found out what she was about, 'Oh, you're a youth worker. Guess what? I'm only a 14 year old'. So we initiated contact with my mother through [her] legal straight world and she pretended to be my guardian. I'd go down to the youth centre in the Cross and talk to [my parents]. So it wasn't like I was the runaway kid or the drug addict or the fucked up child.

[Once we made contact again] my mum was fantastic. She tells me that her girlfriends would say, 'Where's Paxton? What's going on? You got contact with him, how come you're not getting back?' [Her response] wasn't, 'he's a little shit', [but that] life was better. She knew that for me as well.

At 17 I was thinking of going overseas. I'd been working a lot and was very, very well known for being the youngest she-male ever working in Australia – that tag. This is after four years of working in the clubs and making lots of money. I was fairly together. I'd never touched smack. I'd been using speed and pills and alcohol ... At 17, I wasn't being burnt out, but I was thinking, I want a change. The club was good, but it was like I was the princess of a shithole culture, who cared? I'm the top of the shit heap, get over it.

His desire to travel led to a confrontation with his mother that would reveal a great deal about Paxton's past – including information about his [biological] father that had been kept from him. The emotional impact of belatedly discovering the truth about his heritage has clearly stayed with Paxton. It was almost certainly a factor in his estrangement from his mother that led him overseas from more than ten years.

I talked to mum about going overseas and she flipped. I had never questioned why there wasn't many photos in the family house. [There was] dad and mum's families, but no cousins. It turns out that my father wasn't my father. My real father had died before I was born and was Greek. My [step] dad, being a bricklayer, Anglo-Saxon of four generations, very wealthy and known for building in Australia – me being his first son [was awkward for him]. I was put into ballet at five because I was hop-scotching on the soccer field and embarrassing my dad. I was never right for him. The real problem was mum got knocked up by a Greek man in Tassie when she was like a convent girl, and Prince Charming came down from Sydney and took her and her son ... The story is, you know, he got this woman who's been touched, a wog child. And I never knew that till I was 17. So it all made sense suddenly that my mum would put pressure on me, hiding me away ... I'd be bashed for being loud or extroverted or feminine or gay.

I was like, 'My God, you're kidding me. This makes so much sense ... I wish I knew this ages ago'. So basically, at 18 I got my birth certificate, got a passport, left Australia and travelled for ten years.

For many of the participants in this research, independence was wrested away by their experiences with drugs or involvement with the commercial sex industry. At odds with stereotypical assumptions, however, there was no direct path from one to the other. As the following recollections make clear, drug use was not necessarily linked to later involvement in sex work (or vice versa).

# ALL THAT MONEY IN YOUR HAND JUST FOR DOING THAT

STREETWALKING BLUES

- SEX WORK, ST KILDA AND THE STREET

ALL THAT MONEY IN YOUR HAND JUST FOR DOING THAT



## ALL THAT MONEY IN YOUR HAND JUST FOR DOING THAT

At the conclusion of the previous chapter, I drew attention to the fact that the sex trade and problematic drug use are not intrinsically linked. A number of the fourteen individuals who participated in this project saw the commercial sex industry as a financial opportunity that was entered into prior to any 'heavy' involvement with drugs. Indeed, some had not had any heavy involvement with drugs even after lengthy periods of involvement in the commercial sex industry.

Janine's entry to the 'industry' began, somewhat inadvertently, when she began work as a waitress at a popular restaurant in South Yarra. This led to an opening at a second restaurant in Queensland, an opportunity Janine grasped with enthusiasm. An ad in the paper led to a part-time job and an entry into the sex trade as a receptionist in a brothel. Her story is an intriguing example of how somebody can slowly become immersed in the lifestyle.

**Janine:** [At the age of] 20, I started working in a restaurant [in] Toorak Road. It was a great place. It was huge, and, you know, it had a real vibe about it. A great place to work.

Then they opened up a place in Queensland and I ended up there. 'Will you go up to Queensland and help us set up there?' I said, 'Yeah, up to Surfers, why not?' Gosh, you know, I needed a break, I was falling down. I worked up there a year or so.

I got a job as a receptionist in a massage parlour before I left the restaurant. It sort of overlapped. I was doing a couple of night shifts there. I saw an ad in the paper, you know, receptionist. Gee, you know, I rode there on my push bike ... [laughing] I was so innocent. I used to say to the girls, 'Have a good time'. I was the youngest over there ... In those days the Japanese, like 10 thousand yen was a hundred dollars, and they'd throw me 10 thousand yen. I was getting tips for organising everything. It was all very exciting. I used to think, 'Gosh, all the money you can make'. I worked there about a year. It was a good job you know ... I never 'worked' worked there.

I actually did one job in Surfers – one night this girl asked me if I'd do a job. Like [the brothel] had been closed for a while ... and I'd stopped working in the deli by then so I thought, 'Oh, yeah'. The two men walked in, and [the other woman] was old, like I mean old she was probably 40, you know, that was old to me then and she gets the young good looking guy. I thought it made a difference. It doesn't make any difference what they're like nowadays, but, like, the ugly one picked me and it was like, 'Oh, no, no!' But, you know, like \$200, 'cause it was escort and it was privately arranged ... I don't know where they were from, but they weren't slack with handing over money. I thought, 'Gee, that was easy. All that money in your hand just for doing that'. No, it wasn't [a bad experience]. I remember it vividly. I still remember what he looked like.

I met some friends [at the brothel]. One guy ... he'd never seen [paid for] a girl, he'd talk to me and his friends would go through [the brothel]. I became good friends with him. I went down to Sydney for a holiday and met his girlfriend. She had a spare room and wanted a flatmate. I thought I'm not qualified as anything, I might as well go down to Sydney as an opportunity ... I had a place to live in Armidale, \$45 a week, which was really cheap in those days. So I went down and stayed with his girlfriend. We got on really well – we're still good friends to this day. She worked in a peep show.

I ended up working in Sydney. I hadn't seen heroin at that stage. I went down to the Cross and I knew a friend that worked on the door at the *Pink Pussycat* and he got me a job working behind the bar.

I'm not too sure how [I started working in the peep shows] ... Finally got the guts to do it. In those days in the peep show, [you could do] a thousand dollars a shift easily. Like get up on the stage and get \$10 from five different windows for a strip and vibrator show. I'd walk off the stage after six or seven minutes. There's two girls working, as soon as the window went down, the next [girl] had a go. You went hard, like try to talk [customers] into giving \$10 for three minutes and it happens. It's amazing ...

You don't negotiate [with customers], you *tell* them. When people are told to do things, they do it, 'It's a peep show, not a strip show, if you want to see more, give me a tip. Just put it through there quickly! The other guy's put his money through, he'll get angry!' You just make up bullshit and you hold out vibrators so they stay longer. They get three minutes for their \$2, the window stays up. And if they want to see more, they've got to pay ...

How handy is it for a guy who's feeling horny, to chuck ten bucks through and you can go and hide in the box, it's got tissues in it, have something to look at. Very convenient, you know, no spillage all over the car. It's just a quick fix. Especially at lunchtime. I think it's great.

There were private shows, but they weren't really worth doing, like \$30 for a private strip, but you could do extras. None of the girls did sex though ... it wasn't worth it. They'd get \$80 extra for oral and 50 for hand relief which is really good money. I mean, compared to parlours, 'cause everything you got in the room was yours. If they just want to touch your tits - 'that's an extra \$20', that sort of thing. You had to pay for the room, like you'd pay \$15 [but] that's it. And you'd get your \$20, and anything you got after it.

I got involved with the owner. He had three parlours and he offered one to me to lease, like two and a half thousand dollars a week. It'd been closed for six months. [It only lasted] eight months. When a place has been closed for a while it's hard to get back off the ground ... I spent a couple of grand in advertising. There's a lot of overheads. When you're doing it by yourself, you have to be there from 10.00 o'clock in the morning till 5.00 o'clock the next morning.

[I was] paying the police at that stage too. [The brothel was] illegal ... As soon as I started making more money, the [police] 'rent' started going up. I think it started off at two-two [\$220], and then we had two-five and then it went up to two-eight ... It's the only way to make money you know, to cover the overheads.

Riley, as noted, had left school to begin a hairdressing apprenticeship. It was during his apprenticeship, that he became attracted to the lifestyles of older friends in the 'gay scene'. These friends supported their lifestyles as 'escorts' and, at Riley's insistence, they introduced him to an escort agency at the age of 15. Again, like Janine, economic motives, as opposed to drugs were the factor in Riley's decision.

**Riley:** Once I started hairdressing I moved into share accommodation. I stopped acting and did hairdressing for nine months. The pay was shit. Working 60 hours a week and getting \$110 was not worth it and that's when I got into prostitution. I would've been 15, just turning 16.

I had pissed off the apprentice hairdressing and, because of that, I couldn't pay my rent and had nowhere to go. I knew a couple of guys from the gay scene and went back to their house one night. These guys had a flat in Collingwood. It was one of those places where everyone crashes. I ended up staying there and sort of never left ...

Some of the guys happened to be escorts. They were like 22, 23 years old. They always had money, no need for anything, no 8-hour a day job. It was sort of tantalising. I thought, 'this is a good idea. I might as well give it a go'.

I started at the age of 15 - an escort agency in Brunswick. I worked there for two years. The manager knew my age ... she just said, 'get some fake ID, I'll take photocopies to put in the files. If anyone queries it I can say, I didn't know'. [That] as far as she knew this [name on the fake ID] was my name. She was fully licensed. She loved the fact that she could make a lot of money out of me.

I was the youngest escort. The youngest other than me would have been maybe 20. As a result, I was getting a hell of a lot of business. I was probably earning 3 to 5,000 dollars a week. That's what I was getting as my cut. The manager's cut would have been a third. If you're getting \$150 an hour, the establishment would take 50. It was \$150 an hour when I first started. Now it's less. I don't know why. Maybe it's not less. Maybe that's what she was charging because I was so young.

The first time I was petrified. I didn't know what to expect. It happened to be at some hotel. I got buzzed in and knocked on the door and some old fat man answered the door ... Eeeerr, yuck! But then he handed me \$250 and I thought, 'Wow! 250 bucks, that's not too bad for an hour'. The first experience was fine. He actually extended it for another hour, so that was 500. I got 350 when I got back. That was good... two hours work, 350 bucks ... I did two more jobs that night.



Far from being ashamed of his work, Riley found it rewarding in 'some weird and wonderful' emotional sense. Further, it was supporting a lifestyle in which money was no longer an object. It is 'easy money' that shines though Riley's account as *the* incentive behind his working life. It says a great deal that even the best (and frantic efforts) of his mother, the intervention of child protection authorities, and repeated police raids on the agency at which he worked, could not dissuade Riley from continuing to work as an underage, illegal escort.

At that age, someone paying to be with you is quite a compliment. That's the way I saw it. I saw it as being liked, and, in a certain weird and wonderful way, I saw it as being loved. These guys were paying to be with me, so therefore they really liked me. If they're willing to pay that much money, then they obviously must really, *really* like me, especially the ones that would call back and want to see me again.

There was never any violence. The agency knows where you're sent. The clients' know that if it's a credit card job the agency has got all their details. Even if it's not a credit card job, you've got the driver waiting downstairs who knows which room the job is in. If the job goes over an hour and there's not a phone call made, the driver will come upstairs to check on you. So it's pretty safe. I think the clients know not to do anything because when they initially ring up, they give their name and their address and they know there's a driver waiting downstairs.

I thought it was fantastic that I had so much money. I wasn't using drugs at all, so I was just spending it on my lifestyle – clothes and rent. Because I was so young I couldn't rent a flat – I couldn't get a lease, so I was living in a serviced apartment that was 110, 120 a night. The rent was just ridiculous; I was paying, like, 900 a week.

At first Mum didn't know. But one day I had about four and a half grand in my wallet, a hell of a lot of money. We went out to lunch with my sister. Looking back, it was so stupid. I was gloating about it:

'I've got a new job mum'.

'What are you doing?'

I opened up my wallet and said, 'look'.

'Where the hell did you get all that money?'

'From my job.'

She said, 'It's illegal isn't it?'

'No, it's not, I'm a prostitute'.

It didn't go down well at all. Not very well at all.

There was definitely a period of estrangement, probably for a couple of years. She called the police and the police raided the agency. [The management] got me out the back door, so the police went through and couldn't find me. They came and got me after the police left. They raided about three times looking for me.

Mum got involved with whatever it was called back then ... CSV. She had to bring me to these meetings where they were saying, 'You've got to stop this. You're not even old enough to be having sex. You can't be doing illegal prostitution'. I was a pig-headed bastard – I said, 'You can't stop me. If I want to do it, I'll do it. I'll just walk out of here right now'. And I did. That's why mum was upset and tried to get the police to go back the second and third times. She wanted the place closed down.

My sister was alright, she was really blasé about it all. She was like, 'Oh, wow, you've got so much money, that's really cool'. That day I think I gave her 400 bucks. I gave mum some money too, but she didn't want it. I gave it to my sister to give to mum anyway.

Despite Riley's disregard of his mother's understandable concern (and the (failed) intervention of state authorities), his mother did not attempt to have him placed in 'protective' care. After some time, the issue was 'resolved' in the sense that it was simply not raised in future discussions between Riley and his mother.

I said, 'If you ever did that to me, mum [put me in care], I wouldn't speak to you again'. She said, 'I wouldn't put you away. That's not what I want for you. You're a smart enough boy. I suppose this is your life. If this is what you choose to do, then this is what you choose to do. I'll leave it up to you and hopefully you make the right decision'. And it was sort of left at that.

Simone came to St Kilda's streets after fleeing an abusive husband and finding herself without an immediate source of income. Simone had used drugs before she first came to St Kilda's street circuit. However, this was little more than experimental use. The fact that it was intravenous drug use should not be read to imply a 'heavy' level of drug use. Intravenous drug use is associated with stereotypical 'junkies' in the public mind. However, it is simply another method of administering drugs – albeit a more economical method than intranasal drug use.

**Simone:** [I got introduced to injecting drug use] by a friend. It was Temazepam. She shot it up for me. She came to my house with the needle all ready and I think it was more or less, 'Let's see what the buzz is'. I'd never been into drugs, just wacky-tobacco [marijuana].

A male friend at my ex-husband's club where he does lawn balls. He introduced me to speed. I had that a few times. I tried it about five times before [I began working] and then I started getting the taste for it.

As her last sentence suggests, there was no link between Simone's illicit drug use and her engagement in sex work at the relatively late age of forty. Driven from her abusive husband, Simone took refuge with a friend in Melbourne's western suburbs.

I had to run to get away from him. He raped me three times in one week. I went to a girlfriend of mine and stayed for about two weeks because I was more or less homeless ... and I started working. Yeah, it was purely for survival. I was on

Disability [Support] Pension, but it was purely for survival. I ran away from the western suburbs because he found out where I was living. I've been here since [inner SE suburbs]. I wasn't [sex] working in the western suburbs, I was working here [in St Kilda]. I was coming to work every night and then I moved to this side of town to get away and start a fresh life – a new life.

Despite her immediate circumstances, Simone received little sympathy from her family members.

My relationship with [my family] dissolved when I started [sex] working 'cause my second ex-husband somehow found out. I only did it for survival and the whole family disowned me. I suppose in a way they disowned me years ago 'cause we've never really had a good relationship, me and my parents.

[My daughters] disowned me too. My eldest daughter used to turn around and say, 'I don't want you to talk to me until you get a decent job'. I turned around and said, 'you should love your mum regardless of what she does for a living'. That hurt me big time. That really devastated me, but I thought, 'I'm not going to change for anybody', they're going to have to come around and see it my way. I said to them, 'I'm doing it for pure survival'. They should have loved me regardless too, but they didn't.

It is not surprising that, for Simone, the loss of family support increased the attraction of the informal sense of community that exists among many street sex workers. Even after having left the street by the time we first met, Simone remained in contact with several workers.

I made a lot of friends, work acquaintances. I used to say, 'Partners in crime'. I still say hello to them. I still say, 'Us workers' because I still consider myself [a worker], even though I don't work. I still do love them dearly, but they were never really friends, they were my partners in crime. One thing I have gotten to know is you never trust them. They will rot you silly. I tried to help a few people and they robbed me fair and square. I let them in my place because they're homeless ... never again. I have always been a softhearted person. I had to learn to be hard. But I still love a few of them dearly.

In addition to the sense of community and the money needed, Simone was one of those few individuals, like Riley, who find they are able derive some emotional benefit from sex work. Having been abused and treated as a lesser member of her family, and then each of two marriages, the feeling of being 'wanted' was empowering.

I fitted in St Kilda like a missing piece of a jigsaw puzzle. I took to the streets straight away the first night it was like I had worked for years. I just remember going to my first car, 'yes how may I help you?' Showing a bit of cleavage. I fell into the job straight away. It was like I was born to do this.

You either feel comfortable doing it or [you don't]. I surprised myself. I think it always fascinated me in a way, that's probably why I fell into it straight away. Plus being a personal carer I've always been good with people. When people asked me, 'what do you do for a living?' I used say, 'I'm a lady of the night'. I wasn't ashamed of it. You know, there's people you can tell and people that you can't. I'm not ashamed, never was, never have been, never will be.

Yeah, I was doing it for survival, but I was also enjoying myself. I think, in a way, I was doing it because it felt good – even though they were paying me – I could truthfully say that I felt loved for a little while. I think that's what I needed. That's what I craved because I missed out on that all my life. I think that's the only way I found of getting it, if you know what I mean? For that little bit of time, it felt good to be loved.

Both Tina and Paxton also engaged in sex work as a means on accessing a steady (and sufficient) source of income. However, their financial needs had little to do with illicit drugs. Tina found herself lacking in the confidence needed to pursue the singing / stage career that remains her ambition. While she has performed, and continues to perform, at various levels in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, Tina's lack of self-belief, coupled with increasingly limited opportunities for 'showgirls' meant that sex work was one of few sources of income open to a young transsexual woman.

**Tina:** In Melbourne, it can be pathetic, you know, the clique-ness. I wouldn't give them the time of day. I've done a few performances around but they rip us off. They clubs expect to be able to take, take, take. Wear the girls out and then when they've had enough and the crowds not coming [get rid of them]. There's no support and that's from the gay scene as well. There's no support – That's why there's no transsexuals doing shows, it's all drag queens.

My dream is to get back performing in the mainstream and I should've done it six years ago when I first started, but you don't have the mental side of, not the experience but the confidence. And that's the down and out truth, you don't have the confidence to get out there in the mainstream and just show what you've got.

Tina was introduced to sex work by her friend Neela, also a stage performer. Neela is also compelled to engage in sex work to meet her financial needs.

I was 19 [or] 18 [when I started street sex work]. I had to. [Neela and I] were living together, there's some funny stories we could tell you, but yeah, we had no choice, it was either work or you didn't have a roof over your head ... I've stayed at friends but I've never gotten myself into trouble where it's basically you're homeless, got nothing. I wouldn't allow myself to get to that ... There's been lots of times where me and Neela have helped each other out.

*[Was it a lack a confidence that meant, for period of time, you found yourself having to do work you didn't want to do – the street stuff?]* Oh definitely, definitely ... you have to survive and no one else is going to pay your bills. Financially you have to support yourself and deal with everything else. You can't stop. If you're going through depression and paranoia and all that, you can't stop, you've got to keep on going.

Tina's lifestyle comes at a high cost. Money is needed for many things, including the commission and manufacture of elaborate performance costumes (as well as everyday outfits), make-up, pedicures and hair care, as well as past surgical procedures and hormone treatment. When we first met, Tina also had a two show horses in stables and two apartments that served different purposes.

I'd need a thousand to a thousand and two hundred [for living expenses each week]. In terms of costumes, the horses, the rent. It's an expensive way of living because you need the things that we get – make up, hair, beautician work, it all has to come together so you look good. Whether your appearance is for the day, for a show, working on the door of nightclubs, so the money does come in very handy.

A far less reluctant participant in commercial sexual activity, Paxton's travels outside Australia involved various types of employment in Japan and the United States. In the latter, this took the form of 'freelance' sex work, advertising through newspapers. While no stranger to drug use, this was kept, without apparent difficulty, to a manageable level. The sex work was motivated solely by the need for a steady source of income. Paxton's earliest entry into the sex trade, however, came at 16 years of age when he ventured down to Melbourne to work in a brothel, a time during which he was introduced to heroin use, although, again, this did not appear to be a determining factor in his involvement in the sex trade.

**Paxton:** I came down here [to Melbourne] for about three, four weeks to move from Sydney. I had got into drugs more in Sydney and had left the squat world, getting more into the club thing and being more independent. It was, like, I need something more because it was actually affecting me a bit. So I came down here. A girlfriend from Melbourne who I met up in Sydney told me about the parlour she worked in. It's just like, you could stay there, you got a job.

This was when I was 16. I came down to Melbourne to work in a parlour for the first time ... I'm doing sex work. It was great. So I had my first introduction to the Melbourne scene and there was lots of smack down here. I started using smack for the first time down here then ... and whoring at the parlour. I was very busy 'cause I was the new girl sort of thing ... and then I totally freaked out – it was just too much. My best friend, who I moved down with, she actually got AIDS from a guy down here, the first female [to contract AIDS] so that was happening at the same time. I was only down here about a month.

I went back to Sydney and got back into shows. In those days it was secretive to be a sex worker – you didn't talk about it. We knew the people who whored but you never talked about it with someone else. So I never did sex work 'cause I was the show person, and known for that. A bit like, 'I can't be seen and known as that'. I used to visit friends, picking friends up in parlours and I was intrigued by it. But in this whole other world, everyone from the parlours used to go to the club to see the show, so it was this illusion that you're in a hierarchy 'cause you're the 'star' sort of crap.

It was at this point, after a whirlwind, but eventful, month in Melbourne and a return to the top of the 'shitheap' in the Sydney club scene that Paxton undertook his overseas travels and embarked on a series of adventurous experiences.

Mia was the most experienced worker who took part in this project. She began working in Melbourne's thriving illicit brothel industry in the late 1970s after her social life had led to a friendship with a worker in Eaton Square. This was prior to any serious involvement with drugs and was a financial decision. As she explains:

**Mia:** I used to work in Eaton Square in St Kilda Road. There used to be 30 brothels – 474 to 476 St Kilda Road – It was incredible. That was the illegal days, it was all illegal. We used to fuck police all the time and pay cops. It was bizarre. But big dollars, I mean that's when the big money was around – you were pulling thousands a night. There was so much corruption. It was just incredible. It's gone now. Leopold Street and St Kilda Road. I think *Barbarino's* [restaurant] is there now. It used to be a big square. On Leopold Street there was 10 brothels and then in the square part, there was about 20. It was just incredible. I had my son in '77 and I started working about a year after that, '78 yeah '78 to '85 but it was open a long time prior to '78.

I was working at [a bar] and this chick used to drink there. She used to work at Eaton Square. I asked her and she said if you want to try it out come down. I went down with her to Eaton Square and that's how it all started. The first day I got busted. That freaked me out. I pissed off and didn't come back for about three weeks.

I dropped that 'sex' word. The [Victoria Police] vice squad used to come in and make out that they were customers and you'd quote prices. [To be arrested] you'd have to say 'sex'. If you keep going around it, like, 'Yeah, I'd give you a really good time and nice massage' 'But I want sex', 'No, you'll have a *really* good time'. As soon as you say sex, bang! [You're arrested] and that happened to me on the first day. It freaked me out [but] I ended up going back to it. You paid fines when you got busted or, you know, the owner of the brothel would pay the police off, then you'd be servicing police with sexual favours instead of actually getting fined yourself.

I miss it. I miss the girls and the closeness of working and going out after a night, like, that's when the Chevron was open and it was just past the Chevron. In those days in the Square, some of the brothels were beautiful ... but then a lot of them, there wasn't even mattresses in the room, they were just massage tables, you know the real high ones? And plus in those days condoms weren't really a big thing either 'cause that was the 70s and early 80s ... God, we weren't even using condoms in those days. Still, I can honestly say all the years I've worked, I think I've picked up crabs and that's basically it. Because you're having sex, you always go for check-ups. You're aware of your body. HIV and all that coming in the mid-80s, led to a big change.

HE DIDN'T PUT  
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STREETWALKING BLUES

- SEX WORK, ST KILDA AND THE STREET

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## HE DIDN'T PUT A GUN TO MY HEAD AND STICK IT IN MY ARM

In contrast to those who, at least initially, saw sex work in terms of a financial opportunity, those participants whose use of drugs in general, and of heroin in particular, predated their involvement in sex work remember a very different entry into the 'trade'. For these individuals, problematic patterns of heroin use, and the accompanying financial demands, were at least partially, if not wholly, responsible for their entry into the commercial sex industry, often beginning in escort agencies and brothels, before the increasingly unmanageable nature of their drug use led them to 'the street'.

The widespread perception of heroin use as signifying 'one step over the line' (i.e. into the realm of the 'junkie') is not solely a perception of Joe Public. It is shared by the greater majority of those who use so-called 'softer' drugs, particularly marijuana and 'party drugs' such as ecstasy. Even for frequent users of amphetamines, a change from nasal to intravenous administration can be enough to ostracise those who choose the latter method.

This may appear to be a divergence of sorts. However, drug dependent street sex workers often encounter discrimination because they are sex workers and *also* because they are intravenous drug users. There is no rational reason for discriminating against those who choose to administer a drug intravenously other than the association of 'the needle' with 'junkie' stereotypes and, since the mid-1980s, the spread of blood-borne viruses (and HIV in particular).<sup>17</sup> Certainly the nasal inhalation of amphetamines, cocaine or any drug can be injurious to the extent of causing the nasal septum to collapse. In comparison, the use (and responsible disposal) of sterile injecting equipment is a safe (and economical) means of taking a drug – hence the use of syringes for vaccinations, pain management and myriad medical procedures.

## A CIRCLE OF FRIENDS

Several participants were introduced to injecting drug use through friends. This is a common experience for a number of reasons. Seeing a trusted friend inject a drug and experience the resultant euphoria without any (immediate) sign of decay doubtless has an impact upon previously held perceptions of injecting drug use. In this sense, exposure to heroin use results in the drug being demythologised. Heroin, it must be remembered, is subject to a reputation that far outweighs its pharmacological properties. When the expected consequences that have comprised educational campaigns and 'shock-tactic' advertisements (i.e. overdose, immediate addiction) fail to materialise, the drug's 'evil'

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<sup>17</sup> This is a threat only to those who share needles – despite public hysteria, there has not been one documented case of HIV infection as a consequence of a needlestick injury from a discarded needle in Australia.



reputation may be diminished to some extent.<sup>18</sup> These factors are combined with the fact that they now have access to the drug – they now have a contact! This might make usage tempting for those who already have a history of drug use, and particularly a history of injecting drug use.

**Althea:** The first time I used smack I was about 20. It wasn't long after I got back to Australia ... A few of my friends took heroin – musicians that had habits and were pretty heavily into it. I found out years later that their girlfriends were working in [massage] parlours, but they kept it very quiet ... people like to gossip.

The first time I tried heroin, a friend wanted to get a \$50 deal. I don't know if he had a habit or not ... probably, but kept it pretty wrapped [secret]. He didn't have enough money, so asked if I wanted to go halves. I said, 'I've never tried it before' and so [he said] 'Oh, no, I don't want you to'. I go, 'Yeah, I'd do it'. So I put in the 25 for half of 50, which was a huge amount [then]. This was at *Inflation* [a nightclub in King Street Melbourne]. I thought he's going to give me a bit of paper or foil but it came back in a syringe and he said it was half of it. I said, 'Well, I don't want half of it, it'll be too much'. I squirted some back for him, and probably had about a third of it. I was in the bathroom, doing it, and went [passed] out ... [*Althea emerged what must have been some hours later, the nightclub, then with a 5.00am licence, having closed*]. I remember *Inflation* had closed. I went downstairs to look for friends. There were these little side tables, they were upside down so they [the cleaners] could do the sweeping and I chucked in the underside of a table. I quickly got pushed downstairs, 'Get out of here!'

I was using needles with speed. That's what everyone was into on the weekends and I started using smack a bit. I don't know why I continued. Like other friends used it a couple of times, and we're, you know, sick on it, but the thing is, with heroin, you get heroin nausea ... vomit falls out ... there's none of this gut wrenching crap, it was easy. It was quite hysterical, open your mouth and it falls out. If it had had been a strain, I don't think I'd have really used it again.

Jem was also introduced to heroin through friends. However, she was, arguably, at a far more impressionable age than Althea. Certainly, she acknowledges that the behaviour of older friends impressed her (and, in particular, the behaviour of those from the 'rough part of town'). Her behaviour – running away from home, smoking marijuana at an early age – suggests something of a tendency for living for the present (and 'on the edge'?) Watching an older acquaintance under the influence of heroin was something that impressed Jem and it was not long before she was buying and injecting heroin on her own.

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<sup>18</sup> There are obvious lessons here for those who design anti-drug campaigns and 'public service' messages for public consumption. While this is not the place to enter into discussion of this issue, the implications should be reasonably obvious.

**Jem:** [I've been] on heroin since the age of 14. I had a best friend back then and she was a few years older than me, so that impressed me a bit. I used to stay at her place, and she used to stay in, like, the rough part of town. She introduced me to her neighbours; she used to look after their kids. I met this woman there ... a heroin addict. This bird used to get me to come out with her, and we used to ... it's not good, but we used to come to shopping centres and [steal] cartons of cigarettes and then we'd sell them and she'd give me money.

Once we had the money, she'd make a phone call. This was all new to me, you know. Then this guy would come with this little bit of foil and she used to openly do it in front of me. I suppose I'd sort of see, you know, what it was doing to her and that sort of impresses you. At the start she was giving me a little bit, but she was only letting me snort it. Probably after about, I don't know, six months, I knew her dealers and all that, so I used to ring up them and go score by meself. Just through watching her, I knew how to, like, use a syringe and everything ...

Like Jem, Denise began injecting drugs at a young age. It is notable that she first injected 'speed' at the age of 13, the same age at which she became a state ward. Her drug use was initially intermittent before a friend's persistent urging broke through her resistance and led to her first experience with heroin. Her resistance had derived from her fear that heroin use would result in her 'losing it all'. Although her initial heroin consumption was characterised by periods of heavy use, alternating with periods of abstinence, it would eventually spiral out of control (and her worst fears would be confirmed).

**Denise:** I had my first hit at 13. [I have had periods of not using]. Yep. One year, [when I was] about 18, 19, I stopped for a whole year. I didn't use 'cause I liked somebody. They used [drugs] ... but they wouldn't use needles. They would do it sometimes on the weekends and I'd do it every day and they pretty much gave me an ultimatum ... stop using or the relationship is over.

I started with speed ... with a needle. I've only used smack in the last eight or nine years. I had a friend who kept trying to push it [heroin] ... she kept trying to get me to use it, and I wouldn't because I knew, like, you do it, that's the end of everything ... [I'd] just lose it all.

I would say I was about 22, one day I got bored and said okay. I just did it and I didn't stop. I could use full on as hard as I wanted, three months, but I'd stop and would be fine the next day and not hang out for the next six months and then do it again. I kept doing that for about four years and then one day I knew that was the end, like every time I'd stop it would get harder and harder. In the end I couldn't do that any more. I was going to feel all the symptoms, like all the shit that people feel, and so ever since [I've used heroin] ... and then I pretty much lost everything because I had to sell everything ... [I was using] about half a gram, a gram a day. About 400 bucks [a day].

## FAMILY

Another common introduction to drug use is through family members. Living with her 'drug fucked' oldest sister in coastal NSW placed Emily in an environment of constant heroin use. Emily did not find this a disturbing experience, having been exposed to injecting drug use from an early age. However, in contrast to Althea, Emily had seen firsthand the *negative* effects that heroin had had on her sister's life and she went to stay with her sister steadfastly opposed to heroin use. However, Emily's resistance was challenged and worn down by the apparent euphoria and tranquillity she perceived in her sister's 'friends' when under heroin's influence. As noted above, heroin use does not necessarily result in immediately apparent negative effects. Further, Emily's access to the drug was unhindered – her sister was supplying it. Finally, it is important to remember Emily's earlier observation that she often felt she was 'missing out' as a consequence of having a child at a young age. Perhaps, this was a chance to make up for some of that which she had missed out on?

I resisted [heroin]. I wouldn't have a bar of it, but I'd go out and drink and stuff. Kate was dealing when I was really young, (she was 10 years older than me), she use to hide the drugs on me. I've seen people shoot up since I was about eight. I didn't find it scary ... like the sight of needles didn't freak me. [One night] there were about 10 people over. It was a really hot night and they were all shooting up. There was this pregnant woman, she had a hit and she was laying on her back and someone was painting her stomach. I thought, 'This looks beautiful, you know, hippy love, wonderful warm night, gimme some'. And, I've got that addict gene or whatever it is ... I went 'fabulous' and didn't look back.

I stayed there another six months, using pretty regularly. The dynamic between Kate and myself changed. Before I started using heavy drugs, I could stand up to her and tell her what for ... to pull her finger out. Like, take my jeans off, I didn't let you lend them. As soon as I started using, it was like a power shift and my self-esteem just plummeted. She was giving it [heroin] to me. She was very protective of me when I was young, but it was like the protector became the predator. Now that I'm clean I'm actually able to stand up to her but for a lot of years [I couldn't] ... she worked out scams, 'You go and chat that guy up and I'll go and take his wallet'. I was always too chicken to do the hard stuff, so she used me as bait. I was never that game to do anything really nasty, so I took this passive role. She did a lot of the dirty work and I just kind of fell into line you know, the younger sister.

She's a piece of work Kate ... I mean we laugh about this now, but Kate owed all this drug money to these Turkish guys. This is back in the 80s, and she didn't have the money to pay them. She got [my sister] Lauren, who was only about 18, and said, 'I want you to come around and meet some friends'. She basically opened the door and pushed Lauren in as payment.

Needing to break from her older sister's influence, Emily relocated to Castlemaine where Lauren was living and could provide a greater degree of family support. Although she continued to use heroin, her use was intermittent, a combination of factors that included her entry into a methadone program, a long-term relationship, the need to care for her daughter and, perhaps most influential, her distance from Melbourne and, consequently, a regular contact through whom to buy heroin. However, she was not content in her surroundings and the intermittent heroin use was obviously an attraction.

**Emily:** [I moved to] Castlemaine. Lauren was living in Castlemaine at that stage. I was 24 and had met a guy. We were together for about five years and we had a house in the country with [my daughter].

It was kind of dole day using. We travelled up to Melbourne once a fortnight [to score]. [My boyfriend was] a musician. If he got a gig in Melbourne, we'd go. You pay the rent and buy the food and whatever was left went on pot, alcohol. I guess living in the country, you could kind of function ... It wasn't hardcore like when you live in the city. I went on methadone, so that would kind of hold me between days when I didn't use. It was OK [getting methadone in a country town]. [My daughter] went to the same school as the local doctor's children. I was working in a restaurant for the local justice of the peace and he knew [about the methadone]. I wasn't a dishonest or bad person and I think people like to give me a go. You know, I've ripped people off ... I'd take money from the till but I wouldn't take heaps. I just couldn't ... I was so scared of being caught and found out. I've just had this life, one foot in real life, one foot in [a 'drug life'] which is a shitty place to be because you never reach rock bottom to fix yourself up, but you're never quite in the real world.

Simon was introduced to injecting drug use by his uncle, even prior to working the infamous 'Wall' in Darlinghurst. Although his experiences with sex work were partially a consequence of his inquisitive and extroverted exploring of his sexuality, Simon's increasing drug use became entwined with sex work.

**Simon:** I can't really remember [how I started] working. Oh, you always need money, always need money. I know I started working when I started using. I used first. I was 16 probably. Heroin first ... I didn't know what to do. I stuck a needle in and pushed the plunger in, not even into a vein, just straight in.

I used to hang out with my uncle. Mum's the oldest out of six kids, so [my aunts and uncles] are not much older than me. I would go with [my uncle] in the back of the car and they'd be out scoring and getting on, I witnessed it all. So when I wanted to do it, I went by myself, saw someone who I knew selling [heroin] at Kings Cross. I went home and sat in my mum's sun room and mixed up. Mum was living in Sydney. Her and my stepfather, they'd just moved over. I had half of it, thought I'd be sensible. I sat there and did it all wrong and thought it wasn't that great, so I'd better do it again ...

## BOYFRIEND

A number of female participants in this project were introduced to injecting drug use through male friends. In Lisa's case, it was her boyfriend who first injected her with heroin.

**Lisa:** I met my first serious boyfriend just after I left school, and he was using heroin. I used to look up to him. He was the older guy in our group, the one with the car and all that. He used to drive me home. Within three months of going out with him, I'd moved out of home and moved into his grandparent's place with him.

I never knew he was on heroin back then, but then seeing my friends stuffing up and, you know, throwing up in the gutter and shit. I realised something was going on and in the end I wanted to try it too. Basically I wanted to know what the big deal was ... curiosity killed the cat.

*[What do you remember about the first time you used?]* It was about 20 minutes before his nanna was going to call us for dinner. He was mulling it up in the bedroom and I asked for some. He asked me if I was sure, basically I said, 'yes' ... After all that happened [later] he blamed himself for giving it to me. I said to him that he didn't put a gun to my head or bail me up in a corner and stick it in my arm so ... He didn't really [try to talk me out of it], but he didn't force it onto me either. And I asked, he didn't exactly offer. The feeling was ... like people who smoke marijuana, it was the intensity of that times a hundred ... I wasn't very hungry that night, that's for sure.

At the age of 18, Laura, as noted, had started spending time at a Grey St 'party house' occupied by a group of men she met while working at the *Prince of Wales*, a popular pub in St Kilda. Eventually, she became an occupant of the house and her drug use escalated. With hindsight, she realises that her 'housemates' were simply using her, or her money, to finance their own drug use, while, without an apparent second thought, encouraging her own drug use.

**Laura:** We were smoking chuff, this and that. I always thought that the guys were just stoned on chuff but it ended up coming out one day ... heroin. They said, 'Do you want to try it?' I was a bit hesitant. I said, you know, 'What are the effects?' 'Oh, it's fine. It's just like chuff when you want to give it up, you give it up'. I am very gullible. I had just turned 18. I'm a real sucker, you know, I tend to get walked over a bit. They'd say, 'Oh, give us 200 bucks [to pay for your heroin]' and they'd give me five dollars worth and they'd have the rest. So basically I was supporting their habits. I was working a lot of hours ... I had money, so they used me.

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STREETWALKING BLUES

- SEX WORK, ST KILDA AND THE STREET

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# I WOULDN'T WISH IT UPON MY WORST ENEMY ... A HEROIN ADDICTION

Denise's initial 'on again / off again' experiences with heroin are not unusual. Many users manage to control their consumption for some time. Indeed, for some, injecting drug use may remain an infrequent 'recreational' experience. For those, such as Denise, however, problematic patterns of use emerge as the attraction of the drug (and increasing physical and / or psychological dependence) begins to exert a greater degree of control over their lives. In contrast to Denise, Althea, can't recall the moment at which her heroin use passed from 'recreational' to 'dependent' use. However, she did enjoy a number of years in which her heroin use was an enjoyable activity as opposed to the source of 'junk sickness':

**Althea:** I didn't get my first [heroin] habit till I was about 27 ...it was a good three, four years from the time I started using till the time I got a habit – probably about four years.

I lived with this girl who went out with this guy. They spent every night together, either at our place or his place. Every second Saturday night, he had a job and because he finished at four in the morning, he'd just go [to his] home. So she'd stay home. She's an artist, so she'd draw me. What we'd do was buy a \$50 cap of heroin and go halves in that. The first Saturday night, we would have a half of a half each, a quarter of a \$50 cap each, 12.50 each and with the buckets [for throwing up] beside us, in the lounge room. I'd be sitting there, on the nod, and every time I'd move ... waahhh! [vomiting]. It was great, she loved it, 'cause every other time she tried to draw me, I couldn't sit still for two seconds. She'd be on the nod and drawing and when I went to throw up, she'd wake up and start drawing me again, 'Don't change that pose, that's great'. We'd lock ourselves in. We'd tell people we're not going out tonight or we'd tell our friends that we're doing a family thing. No one ever jerried [caught on] that we were actually in our apartment ... it was our secret. Every fortnight, we'd use \$12.50 each of heroin. We'd really look forward to that fortnight. It's amazing to think that \$25 each was a month's supply ... two hits each. That's the first regular heroin use I was into.

I don't know how it started getting to the point where I had a habit ... to wake up one day and realise that you're sick. It took me a long time to get to that stage ... and using a lot of heroin, maybe like three or four hundred [dollars] a day.

Althea found that one effect of her heavy heroin use of heroin was to restrict her social contact to a particular group of 'friends'. It is in a user's social interactions that the distinction between heroin 'being a part of your life and heroin *being* your life' is seen most clearly. As one writer (and user) has observed:

If it [heroin] pushes people away and causes you to become alienated from other human beings, then it is a bad thing. The worst part of allowing your social life to slip away is that it removes an important safety mechanism, which prevents heroin addiction. You need to keep your straight friends.<sup>19</sup>

Unfortunately, once an individual has to address the demands of a heroin dependency, there is little time to spend with those not associated with the drug.

**Althea:** You tend to cut off from your straight friends ... you tend to start socialising just with heroin-using friends who, as you rapidly discover when they rip you off, aren't friends anyway. It's a heroin clique ... and they all talk about it basically, which frustrates you. You slowly cut off from your straight friends, your non-heroin using friends and get into the [heroin] scene. Whether you want to get into that scene or not, it's what you have in common. [Also] when I'm stoned, I don't want people to see me ... nowadays I can be stoned around people that are straight and they will never know. But when I was younger, it would hit me [visibly], so I would stay away from people.

Lisa's heroin use was regular from the outset. Her boyfriend supplied and injected her with heroin during this initial period of use. However, she was soon separated from her boyfriend as a consequence of the acquisitive criminal activity that led to his intermittent incarceration.

**Lisa:** [My boyfriend] went to prison after a while. The first time was for three months. It was a suspended sentence ... which he stuffed up. So he automatically did the two months [suspended] plus an extra month for theft. He went on to an ICO after that, Intensive Correction Order, which is almost jail at home. He breached that within a couple of weeks ... it was less than a month and he was back in. I thought, well, I'm not gonna have this life of waiting for somebody in and out of jail. I told him I couldn't stick around ...

He had the [heroin] connections ... but I had his phone. They only knew me as his girlfriend so I rang up [and] explained who I was.

He used to put it in me [inject me]. He didn't let me do myself with needles. When he went to jail he hoped that I wouldn't be able to do myself. That was his intention I think – If he had to suffer in jail I had to suffer on the outside. When he got out he realised that I did [know how to]. I said to him, 'what, did you think you were just going to leave me hanging out for three months? Go cold turkey? I don't think so'.

Like Althea, Lisa lost contact with friends who were not involved with drugs. In Lisa's case, her new circle of 'friends' were concentrated amongst the inner-Melbourne 'heroin scene'. Following her separation from her boyfriend, Lisa began to manipulate family

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<sup>17</sup> Moraes, F. 2001. *The Heroin User's Handbook* Loompanics, Port Townsend, Washington, 137-8.



members, in particular her grandmother, to raise the money needed for her own and others habits. When this source of income was shut off, Lisa began to participate in property crimes. A number of court appearances led to an eventual jail sentence.

*[Where did you live while your boyfriend was in jail?]* Here, there and everywhere. I went back to Nan's for a while. It didn't work out so I started staying with friends ... moving around, back and forth. I'd broken away from all my high school friends 'cause they didn't get involved in that [drug] scene, so I was staying with the drug group. I ended up getting my own contacts. You're around the traps for a while and you meet someone else or you meet their brother, then the next thing you've got his number and you're going through him [for heroin].

Once I got into the city drug scene, we used to go scoring at the flats or scoring in Russell Street. Over time you bump into different people [when] scoring, you start talking, you're scoring off the same person, you end up going down the same laneway, having a hit and hanging around. You meet up with them for a couple of days in a row and then next thing you know you're hanging out together.

I hooked up with my friend Marie and her brother. Two years later I was still hanging around with them. It got to the point where I was seeing one of the brothers and I was supporting all three of us, the sister the brother and myself. My Nan was giving us money. I was lying to my family to get money. That's why they were sticking around, they didn't have to do anything to get money and they could still use drugs.

Back then it was probably \$220 for a 1/2 gram. It was \$320 a gram I think. One of us might have a bit of dole money and I'd ring up [my Nan] and ask for \$150 and say it was for a weekly ticket for the bus, rent money, things like that. [They cut me off] about 40 grand later. I'm lucky they didn't wipe their hands of me for life. After they found out what it was for they wiped their hands of me, which I understand, but I worked my way back and sort of got the family's forgiveness. Money is not an issue. We don't even talk about money any more. If you've got hassles you've got to stand on your own two feet – fair enough.

A lot of it was being afraid of people. They made me feel that I had to do it. I was young and scared. I was 18, Marie was 17 but she was one of those girls who grew up on the rough side, she was tough. I wasn't a streetwise girl when I met up with them. I guess they put fear into me ... It wasn't threats with violence. It was more threats with family. Jason, her brother, had ADD which made things worse – he wasn't on anything for it and using heroin did not agree with him – he was quite schizophrenic. He used to turn around and say I won't hurt you but I'll hurt your family. I know where your Nan lives and your Dad lives.

He put a double barrel shot gun to my head one night and pulled the trigger, he didn't know it wasn't loaded. Once he found out it wasn't, he got his sister to get the bullets from under his Mum's bed and then he tormented me in the backyard

for about 2 1/2 hrs while his Mum was at bingo. [Why?] I was five minutes late home. He let me go to my Nan's. This road [we lived on] takes about 10 minutes to walk down. Nan dropped me off the top, 'I'll drop you here. I'm not taking you to the house because you know I don't want you going there'. So I was late home. He used to say to me, 'if you tell anyone, I'll have your family'. That used to stick in the back of my mind. I wouldn't put it past him because he'd belted his Mum, he was violent.

His Mum ended up ringing the cops on him one night. She rang her other son, he rang the cops and the cops blocked off half of [the] Road and the back streets and side streets. They came in bulletproof vests. I got out while I could. [He was arrested for] armed robbery.

Lisa's time in jail was relatively short but it had a profound effect. The negative experiences that she lived through played a significant part in her decision to pay for her later drug dependency through sex work as opposed to continuing involvement with acquisitive criminal activities (and the likelihood of a second jail term).

I got mixed up with the wrong crowd and ended up involved in stealing cars. I was mainly stealing [cars] to sell like stereos and stuff. Sometimes it was just to get a ride to wherever we were going. A lot of the times the boys would go out and steal and then stupid me would use my ID in *Cash Converters*. That's how I got caught with stolen goods, handling and receiving.

Once the drought hit [2000] I was clean for almost a year [but was still involved in crime] ... I had a suspended sentence hanging over my head which I'd breached by shop lifting so I was on the run for six months. I was in a stolen car with my new boyfriend who was going to pick up off his dealer. We were coming back from Broadmeadows when we got into a high speed chase with the cops. That was how I ended up in jail for three months. I got out two days after my 21st birthday.

I went to Deer Park. Because I was turning 21 around the time of my release I wasn't young enough to be able to go into the junior one [juvenile detention] so they sent me to the big girls house. Scary. I'll never be back, that's for sure. Since then, I haven't had a fine or anything; don't intend to.

When I went to prison, I sent mum a letter explaining what I had done wrong. As far as I know, she still hasn't received this letter because the stepfather rung up my nanna after I sent it and said, basically, we don't think Lisa's sorry for what she's done, we don't think she's learned her lesson. She's not getting any photos of her mum or her stepbrothers so don't ask. That was back in 2000. I haven't written or done anything since. I don't know how they're gonna accept me now.

Like Lisa, Simon found himself using increasing amounts of drugs. The steady source of income Simon made during his early years at 'the wall' was sufficient to provide for his drug use.

**Simon:** I used to have a coke and a heroin habit years ago. 1995-ish. I was paying between 30 for caps of H and 50 for caps of coke. Two points<sup>20</sup> in a cap of coke.

When I was 18 or 19, I worked in a brothel for a little while. I didn't like it much. It was making money for someone else ... and you get paraded in front of mugs, sit around out the back with 10 other guys and they're all bitches ... I can't stand poofers myself [laughter]. I made more money on the street back when I was 17, 18 ...

Emily's drug use also increased when she began working in the sex industry. Her reason for doing so was to earn much needed money to pay for living expenses. However, as she notes, the inability to meet these costs through existing sources of income was due to the amount of money she was spending on drug use.

**Emily:** When I was about 25 or 26, we were really broke and that's when I first came to Melbourne and worked in the brothel. The theory was that we needed money to get ahead on our bills, but the fact is we wouldn't be so far behind if we weren't using drugs. Then I was making good money and that's when my habit increased to everyday. Mine and his. We were dole day using [previously] because that's the only money we had. You can say, 'OK, I only use once a fortnight' 'cause you only have enough money to use once a fortnight. But as the income increased so did the habit.

In contrast to the rising income that saw a corresponding rise in Simon and Emily's heroin use, it was a lack of money that saw Laura tire of the exploitative practices of her 'housemates' and move into accommodation with a boyfriend. She took a heroin habit with her. In a reversal of Lisa's experience, Laura introduced her boyfriend to heroin. Soon she would be struggling to pay the costs of both his and her own heroin dependency.

**Laura:** I woke up one morning, sick as a dog. I rang a friend and said, 'I don't know what's wrong with me'. I explained the symptoms and they said, 'Look, go and buy some heroin, have it, then call me back'. So I did that and of course straightaway I felt fine. I rang him and said, 'Yeah, I feel fine' and he goes, 'You got yourself a habit'. I mean I'd touched everything else ... I'd touched speed, I had touched LSD, I'd touched pot, touched everything, but only socially you know ... it was never habitual. But the heroin ... I wasn't aware of what it does to you. Now, I think it's the most evil drug there is. I wouldn't wish it upon my worst enemy, a heroin addiction. There I was with the heroin addiction.

I was living with a partner who when I met him, wasn't into heroin, but drank a lot. He kept asking me for it and I kept saying, 'No, I'm not going to be the one who gives it to you'. Then I found him going off on his own and buying it, and it worried me that he'd get a hot shot. I thought, if he's going to get it, I might as well give

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<sup>20</sup> A 'point' is equivalent to 0.1 of a gram.

him the stuff that I've got, at least then I know it's not a hot shot and I know how much to give him. Anyway, that turned into a habit as well, so then I had to support both our habits. I was working at *Big Mouth* up in St Kilda, waitressing and managing the bar downstairs, but it got to the stage where I couldn't cope with the bills 'cause he stopped working and just sat at home all day, every day.

A number of those participants who initially entered into sex work as a financial opportunity would later develop problematic patterns of injecting drug use. However, others involved in the project, Tina for example, did not, at any time, inject drugs. The belief that injecting drug use is inseparable from illegal street-based sex work may be the case for many workers. However, it is *most certainly* not the case for all. As Mia observed:

**Mia:** [I've got a] friend that works that doesn't use drugs. It's funny on the street, a few girls go, 'What the fuck is she working here for? She's not on drugs'. She's working for money, but a lot of them can't [understand it]. A lot of girls probably think, 'Fuck, I'd never be doing this job for money. If I wasn't using drugs, I wouldn't be doing it'.

Further, while some workers may be intravenous drug users, they are not necessarily dependent and 'driven' to the street to obtain enough money to meet the demands of their dependency. Although she had injected drugs before she began engaging in illicit sex work, Simone was quick to point out that she only began using drugs regularly after she started working.

**Simone:** I started taking drugs *after* I started [working] because there were nights where you stay up all night and it was fun. [I was] injecting. No, no [fear of the needle]. [Speed] keeps you up and keeps you on the go, keeps you toey.

No attraction [to heroin] at all. I saw a lot of the down side. A lot of the workers did every job just for a hit and I thought, 'No'. When I was working, it wasn't good money every night ... you have a good night and a bad night. If I made any extra money, it was mine to have a good time. I stayed up all night, taking speed, hanging out, watching everything go by. Never a dull moment.

I THOUGHT THIS WOULD  
BE MORE OF AN  
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STREETWALKING BLUES

- SEX WORK, ST KILDA AND THE STREET

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## I THOUGHT THIS WOULD BE MORE OF AN APPROPRIATE WAY TO SUPPORT MYSELF

Once an individual's drug use has escalated to the degree that its cost outstrips their legitimate income, they are compelled to look for 'alternative' sources of income. Some would suggest that one 'alternative' would be to abstain from using drugs. However, when use of a narcotic such as heroin has reached a stage at which a user experiences the intensity of withdrawal symptoms, then the compulsion to relieve the immediate sickness of the withdrawal may be stronger than the ability to endure it.

In the context of heroin withdrawal, earning opportunities that may have been unimaginable, or even scorned in the past, are no longer easily dismissed. This is not to suggest that those dependent on drugs will undertake *any* activity to make money. Although it remains a criminal activity under Victorian law, many people make an ethical decision to engage in illegal sex work in preference to crimes against the person (e.g. robbery, theft, burglary). There is a lack of foundation for the commonly accepted stereotype of the illicit sex worker as an amoral junkie willing to entertain any activity, no matter how degraded, to secure their next 'hit'. Tabloid columnists who see fit to derisively ridicule and pass personal judgment on street sex workers from the comfort of their word processor would do well to take note. The stereotypes they invoke as justification are based on a world that is seen in terms that are as black and white as newsprint. They choose to filter out the grey that comprises the complexities of individual lives and circumstances, betraying either laziness or an inability to accept that are part of a 'society' that results in such circumstances.

Although Althea explains her aversion to criminal activity by attributing it to nerves – 'I'm too chicken' – the ethical basis of her decision is apparent in the following words:

**Althea:** I'm a bit of a lateral thinker - the old saying: don't do the crime if you can't do the time. I just couldn't do the time. I can't even shop lift. I break out in a sweat if I'm shopping with someone I know is a shoplifter. I tell them, 'don't ask me to be look out because they'll [the shopkeepers] just know.' I'm like a beacon. Even if I know they're not doing it, I still break out in a sweat. I'm not real good at things like that. And I've been robbed before ... my house has been broken into. I know what a disgusting feeling that is, your television and your sound system, it's a shit having lost them, but they're replaceable, it's nothing dramatic. It's the fact that people have been in your house.

I just couldn't do that to anyone else. It bugs me when you meet people and they brag, 'oh, I broke into this house and I got this jewellery'. I've seen jewellery that people have stolen from houses and there's not much value in it but you can tell that it would be sentimental ... You've just broken someone's heart.

It's like you've got drug users, you've got addicts and you've got junkies. A lot of us term it like that. Junkies are the ones that will sell their Grandmother for a hit. And you've got addicts, like, emotionally I've hurt people, like my family, but I've never hurt anyone else. I'd never physically hurt anyone and I've never robbed anyone. I've hurt myself but no one else to support my habit. I guess it's got lots to do with your upbringing ... Your morals. Yeah, [I'm a] good Catholic girl.

Many of the contributors to this project agonised over the decision to enter into commercial sexual activity. Some, such as Riley and Simone, found that sex work offered a vague sense of self-worth that was derived from the fact that others were willing to pay to 'love' them (testament to the complexity of the circumstances that brought them to sex work in the first instance). However, most spoke of the difficulties of 'selling' their bodies. Like a number of those who later become street-based workers, Althea began working as an 'escort' before working at one of Melbourne's illegal massage parlours. She only did so once her personal savings were spent.

**Althea:** I didn't start [sex] working until I was 28 or 29. I started escorting to support the habit because the habit got big.

I stopped working and I went through the savings pretty quickly. A friend of mine had done escort work and saved up enough money to go to America to do this acting course. After less than year of escorting, every night, she'd made enough money to pay her return air fare, the course for a year, accommodation and spending money. She didn't have to work at all for the year that she was in New York. She also had a little bit of a habit, just a little bit each night to go to work, just to keep up with it.

She suggested escort work to me. I thought about it for a long time, was spun out about it, and then did it one night. She arranged with her agency that I just do a double with her – any guy that asks for two girls or two guys asking for a girl each. I did two bookings with her the first night, [then] went home, pulled my phone out of the wall and spun out all day, all the rest of the night and all day ... just sitting with this money in front of me freaking out. Two hours with two different guys.

The owner, the boss of the agency rang up the next day and went, 'are you okay?' 'No'. She said go out and spend the money on something nice. She tried to appease me, saying, 'just go and spend it on something extravagant for yourself, something you normally wouldn't buy. I actually went out and bought an \$80 pair of pantyhose. Came home and felt a little bit better but didn't work again for another week, then started working just on weekends. I did that for a little while. On the weekends, I was very busy. I'd get a lot of extensions, keep them talking for a while and say the hour's up and they'd want to stay longer. I was good at that, good at gabbing ...

One experience that Althea shared with Emily was the correlation between earning greater amounts of money (in the sex industry) and using an increasing amount of heroin – a ‘vicious circle’ as she puts it.

The more money I earned the more I started to use [heroin]. It’s a vicious circle. By this time I’d accrued a few debts and gone through all my savings and, you know, debts pile up a bit and so I started working to pay off them [but then] had all this extra money so you just start using a bit more. Oh, you know, I’ll give myself a little reward. Instead of getting 100 [dollars worth], having half of it in the morning when I finish work and then half before I start work the next night I’ll have it all in the morning and buy some more tonight.

At the time I think [the escort work] was illegal. The girls on the phone couldn’t say it was for sex, [it was] just time and company. If we decide to have sex, that’s my decision and, no, you don’t have to pay any extra, it’s my decision. All that sort of stuff just in case it was the police [phoning]. The police would try and bust them every now and then. So the guys would say, ‘well, what do I get for my \$180?’ ‘My time and company for an hour’. ‘Don’t I get anything else?’ If they were genuine guys they’d say, ‘Oh, I don’t get sex as well?’ But if it was the police they’d beat around the bush because they couldn’t actually say it [sex], they had to get you to say it. They taught us how to get out of that one, what to look for and what the spiel was.

Following a number of road accidents in which escorts and their (overly tired) drivers were injured, Althea began working at a brothel.

I did the escort work for just under a year. One of the girls, her driver worked during the day and drove at night [and] they had an accident. It freaked me out a lot. The driver shouldn’t have been working you know, he was tired ... Then Trish came along with this proposition of working during the day so I tried that and that was fine ...

[Trish was] a receptionist at a [massage] parlour – she *really* was a receptionist. All these girls say, ‘I’m a receptionist’, it’s like they’ve got 49 receptionists, one worker. Everyone’s a receptionist – but she actually was. She worked during the day at this parlour and said to me why don’t you try coming in and doing the day, you’d be able to clean up. Three girls worked during the day and they’d been there for ages, an odd lot of odd looking girls. So I worked there and I cleaned up. One of the girls that I got on well with worked at nights on the weekends at another parlour so I tried going there with her and did that. It was, like, ‘beauty, I can quit the escort [agency]’ because I realised you could get paid \$100 an hour and you keep \$100 an hour.



[You would have to give the parlour a cut] but, like, the guy might pay \$180 escort for the hour and you'd get \$100 of that, \$25 goes to your driver so \$75, then if you were paying a bond off that's another \$20<sup>21</sup> ... whereas in a parlour they'll pay the same amount but you get \$100 and you keep \$100, that's what you get in your hand. So that's how I started in parlours. It was more economical and felt safer too.

In contrast, Laura's increasing difficulty meeting the needs of both her partner's and her own heroin dependencies saw her direct entry into the illicit street-based sex industry. This was far from a planned 'career' move. Instead, an opportunity presented itself to make a large amount of money at a time at which money was desperately needed. Like Althea, there was a short period of time between her first experience of sex work and a resigned 'commitment' to the working life. 'Doing crime' did not fit within the financial possibilities she was willing to consider.

**Laura:** I used to walk home from [work at] the *Prince [of Wales]* and *Big Mouth* and I met a couple of the [working] girls. I used to chat to them, you know, give them cigarettes. One day, I was talking to one of the working girls – I never ever considered working – and this guy walked up, a regular of hers, and said, 'Is your girlfriend working?' She said, 'No, she doesn't'. He kept pushing and he got to a very high figure, like \$500 [for] a straight job – he was that keen. She's looking at me ... I hate to say it, but she was saying he's a really easy going guy and it's over and done with like [*click*] and I needed the money. I did it and it wasn't a really horrible, nasty experience. He was an older man and it was over and done with very quickly.

The fact that it's a stranger and you walk into a room and you're having sex ... I didn't think it'd be a horrible experience. It was just the thought of, 'how I would feel doing that with a stranger?' Because he was very gentleman like, it made things a lot more comfortable. I didn't go back out in the street but a couple of weeks after that, I was realising how difficult it was supporting [us] and I went off on my own ... 'cause I didn't wanna do crime you know. So I went off on my own and worked and it just went and went because I had to support the habits and support my partner. I mean it wasn't a relationship. It was just a drug relationship. He was only there because I fed his arm every day.

Laura's experiences, in so far as she began sex working to support both her partner's and her own heroin use, is indicative of the manner in which some young people may be used by others. Often young people find themselves pushed onto the street by older, exploitative men. There is little other workers can do to help them (if, in fact, they are inclined to offer help).

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<sup>21</sup> A number of escort agencies would require their new workers pay a bond. Althea paid a \$1,000 bond to begin working. Twenty dollars of each 'job' would go towards paying off this \$1,000. Consequently, an \$180 job as an escort was earning her just \$55.

**Althea:** [I give advice to] the young 'uns, especially ones who've got some guy tagging along that you've seen with other girls. There's about three or four guys that, every six months or so, they've got another new girl in tow. I think when she catches on [that] he's just a leech using me, getting me to sell my body to feed his arm, the big brave brute [they take off]. If they're smart enough, they catch onto that quickly but sometimes it takes a bit longer. You try and have a quiet word in their ear but they're usually young and in love. A lot of girls start off young, working with supposed men and they think that's all men are. Like the only men around are those leechy [types] ... 'I love you baby, go out and sell your body so I can feed my arm. It's better that you do that than me do rots and burgs. I'll get put in jail for that whereas you don't get put in jail for this.' That's their rationale.

For some workers, the 'decision' to engage in illicit sex work, as opposed to taking part in 'criminal' activities, may be motivated by the desire to avoid imprisonment, an inevitable consequence of a lifestyle of petty and / or property crime. Even so, the sense of 'wrong' attached to 'criminal' activity plays a role in the decision:

**Jem:** [You have a limited number of] choices. You can do what I choose to do, be a sex worker, or you can do crime and face the risk of going to jail. What we're doing is illegal, but you don't wind up in jail really ... I know girls that have had a hundred and one charges, they don't end up in jail. But you can do crime, constantly, get caught, and go to jail. For guilt ... I think it's heavier if it [rests on having committed] on criminal acts.

The limited number of choices available does not make selling one's body on the street any easier. Jem spoke at length about the need to put her working life behind her and 'move on' once the night's work was over. This was something her twin sister had been unable to do.

Being a sex worker, it still is a real hard thing to deal with up here [in one's head]. My sister nearly had a breakdown; she couldn't handle it in her head. My sister's done everything I've done I guess, probably a year behind. My sister doesn't work [sex work]. She has though. She's worked, but she can't handle it. She gives herself a real hard time about it.

You put it [sex work] in perspective, you move on, that's all that is, putting it where it should be.

By her own inadvertent admission, Jem's attempts to 'put it in perspective' were not entirely successful. Her attitude towards the money she earned and the manner in she rationalised spending it on drugs suggests that she is not comfortable with being 'reminded' that her means of earning money involves giving 'a bit of my soul away'.

I have no respect for the money I earn ... that's why it is so easy for me to give it to a drug dealer 'cause I think it's dirty. People sitting there who go, 'Oh, the amount of money you spend on drugs. It's mind-boggling'. But what you don't appreciate [is that] I gave a bit of my soul away to that person for such a low

amount of money. You don't want things around you to remind you of that, you know? If I had sex with a guy and then I went out and bought a vase and put it my home, and I'd be, 'Oh, that vase, I had to do that for that'. That's just me. So it's a lot easier to spend it on a drug. You're not going to have to face it everyday. People say to you, 'Oh, you could have a house, you could have this...' And it's true, you could have all that, but do you really want all the reminders [of how you got them]?

Following her incarceration at Deer Park women's prison, Lisa resumed using heroin (despite being 'clean' for some time before her imprisonment). She soon developed a dependency. Her subsequent entry into the St Kilda sex trade was, like Jem's, a decision made in the context of her desire to avoid further jail time. Three months spent in Deer Park, where she was ostracised and threatened by 'friends', were enough for Lisa to resolve never to return. Although the manner in which she talks about her return to heroin reads almost as if it were a deliberate decision, several factors may have played a role. Her limited accommodation options upon her release led Lisa a friend's public housing apartment on the Atherton Gardens high-rise estate in Fitzroy. At the time, Atherton Gardens was home to a thriving and highly visible heroin trade. Access to the drug, combined with the boredom of unemployment, estrangement from her family and having had her 21st birthday pass while in prison may well have influenced her return to regular heroin use. Regardless of the exact reasons, Lisa chose the streets over acquisitive crime:

**Lisa:** When I got out of prison, I went to my best friend's place in the Fitzroy Flats, which is one of the worst places for high-rise [public housing]. Atherton Gardens. I ended up there ... I stayed there off and on up until the end of the year before last [2002]. So I was there about two and a half years.

I had been clean before I went to prison for about a month. I don't know why [I started using again]. I guess going to prison and then getting out ... basically boredom I suppose. I went straight back and started using. I went down to the street in St Kilda 'cause I decided that if I'm gonna use and have a habit, I'm not gonna shoplift and steal and end up going back to jail. I thought this would be more of an appropriate way to support myself.

The most [heroin use] I got to was 400 a day and that was when I was down the street ... so it was a lot easier to make that kind of money.

As noted above, Emily began working in a brothel to meet the costs of her increasing heroin use. Her initial experiences of the legal sex industry were not, in her eyes, the experiences of an exploited woman forced into sexual slavery. Recollecting her initial entry into the sex industry, Emily likened it to a fantasy existence.

**Emily:** Kate took me in [to the brothel] the first time for a couple of shifts 'cause she needed to make a few bucks. I remember thinking if you can do one you can do a thousand ... I mean if you go to an established brothel, they're quite nice ... if you can't do it, walk. You don't walk in and they put shackles on you or

anything like that. I mean you're not going to seedy underground, hideous places ... I've walked into those types of places and gone, 'No way' and walked out again. If there are clients that [management] think are pretty 'out there' and more experienced woman are working [at the time], they won't let you go with them. Your first experience is usually with the regular, an OK bloke. They look after you. So, you know, you have options.

It's a very unsexual thing. Sex in a brothel and sex in your real life [are very different], you don't have the intimacy [in a brothel]. It's about as intimate as giving someone a massage.

Yeah, [I was nervous the first time] but I had this idea you know, that I was going to be a woman of the night. There was a mystery naughtiness to it. I remember being sent off to the *Hilton* to do a job and the girls were dressing me up ... they put a camel coat on me and did my hair. I think I felt like Julia Roberts marching through [the lobby]. We'd take amphetamines ... it's a big thing in brothels too. So you're off your face and you're running around and you create your fun out of it. Some brothels are high energy and fun, some are just drab and depressing.

94 } However, it wasn't long before her perceptions began to change or, as Emily put it, 'Sometimes you're doing something pretty gross with some fat smelly arsehole and you're just thinking, 'No money's worth this, what am I doing?'' After some time, Emily's life began to follow a pattern of sex work and heroin use, coupled with an increasingly unhappy life at home. It was during this period that she separated from her partner *and* her daughter was taken from her care by the child's father.

I was going up to Melbourne about three, four times a week working in brothels. You know, [making] enough money to survive. We were paying rent ... we rented the same place for four, five years, but, you know, shooting up every second day. I used to drive a 71 Valiant every other day from Castlemaine to Melbourne. Dragging my daughter out of school early [or] sometimes not getting back in time [to pick her up] and ringing up locals and saying, 'Can you pick her up, she's at the bus stop', you know, shitty stuff.

[My relationship was ending] I think he had enough [of the drugs]. I was the one who instigated scoring. Here I am working as a working girl and telling him to cop it sweet, get over it, you know, and that would have been very [hard] ... he'd had no say, he just kind of went along for the ride. He was really a quiet guy and I was kind of all over the place ... I suggested that he go on anti-depressants 'cause he seemed to be getting down. This was in our fifth year being together and we're both using heaps of drugs. Anyway, he went on anti-depressants and about two weeks later, he basically woke up and went, 'This is fucked, I'm leaving'. I think he was just so bogged down in it that he couldn't see the light and these anti-depressants must have given him that [clarity]. He just walked out one day. I was left with this property, with car bodies, syringes, stray cats and a child.

One day I put an ad in the paper, 'Garage Sale', and I just sat there and let anyone come in and take, you know, furniture I'd been given by my mother and grandmother, I was saying, 'Yeah, 20 bucks, 20 bucks'. I even gave the cat away. My daughter, about a week before, had gone with her dad. We had a family meeting and my family is pretty upfront. My mum, [my sister] Lauren, Lena's [my daughter] father and me sat down and they basically said, 'You're fucked, and we don't think Lena is getting the parenting she needs, maybe she should go and live with her dad for a while'. I was friends with her dad, he was 10 years older than me, he's sensible and stuff. He took her to live with him in Melbourne.<sup>22</sup>

The loss of her daughter and partner left Emily, at 28, with 'nothing left to lose'. The removal of any responsibility saw Emily, after a long time with one foot in the 'straight' life and one in the 'drug' life place both squarely in the latter.

I went really downhill. I had nothing left to lose, you know, crash and burn. That's what my family basically said, 'You've got to do what you've got to do'. I'd probably been straining at the leash as a mother at 19, and it was like I had nothing to lose. The idea was now I've got nothing I'll go to rehab, so I went to rehab for like nine days ...Windana, they've got a farm out at Pakenham ... and I took off from there. I had this brand new car. I walked into Hyundai, this is ridiculous, I've taken all these tablets and I was feeling faint. It was a hot day, I walked into Hyundai in Elsternwick and signed up for a car and four days later they let me pick it up. I went, 'Great... fabulous!' The car was at my mums' and I was in rehab. I just nicked off on the next [social welfare] cheque day, got into the car and literally drove til I ran out of petrol. Of all hell holes to break down, run out of petrol, it was Canberra, and I stayed there for two years.

[When I got there] I literally drove to the nearest brothel, walked in and said, 'OK, give me a shift' and they did. You can almost live at a brothel, I have done that, spare room... they'll have some rooms. [Sarcastically], a great way to live a life.

Canberra was like a country town with a city drug problem... I just rorted the town for two years. I got a house – there's no zoning laws as far as working from your house as a prostitute. There can only be two girls working in one place and you actually put ads in the local paper with your mobile number and work from home. I did that for two years.

In contrast to the above, Simon's early entry into street-based sex work and injecting drug use in Sydney came to an abrupt halt in his early 20s. At the time, Simon was living with his (obviously concerned) mother in Sydney. This led to a return to Norfolk Island and a period of some (relative) stability in which he developed a relationship and had two daughters with a work mate. As he explains:

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<sup>22</sup> In our meetings, Emily did not talk about her daughter's father at any length except to say that he was a responsible man without problematic drug issues and with both the ability and capacity to care for their daughter. The relationship was a brief one.

**Simon:** Around my 21st birthday I was living with my mum in Sydney. I met up with her again and she was a bit shocked at me so she wanted me under her wing. Not long after that, I overdosed and dropped completely. I was holding down a job [at the time] as well. I was doing accounts and reception for a service centre. I don't know how it happened. I just went and picked up my usual gear after work and went home and had a bang on the bed, and then I woke up with a packet of peas on my forehead and someone slapping me. They jammed the bloody Narcan in me. So I made a conscious effort [staying off drugs]. I went and worked on Norfolk Island. My ex, the last woman that I had [a relationship with], was the restaurant supervisor and I was in the working in the bar.

The two-year-old was born here [in Melbourne]. I was in Norfolk Island for coming up two years. [My ex] found out she was pregnant within about two or three months of me knowing her. The second one, I'm not sure it's mine ... [laughter] As soon as she had [the first], within a couple of months she was pregnant again, so it works out they're not two years apart, 14 months or something. My oldest, she's three, but she's knocking on four, and the youngest one has just turned two.

Simon and his partner came to Melbourne before his second daughter was born so his partner could be close to her family in the inner south-eastern suburbs. The relationship had, by this time, started to unravel. Despite working two 'straight' jobs and earning a legitimate income, Simon soon resumed his illicit drug use. Ironically, he worked as a security officer at the Atherton Gardens public housing estate, in all likelihood, at the same time that Lisa was living on the estate and resuming her own heroin use:

We were on the rocks for the whole first year that we lived [in Melbourne]. It was our not getting along that pushed me away ... I used to come down here and score from a girl at the *Carlisle Hotel*. It doesn't exist any more, [it's a] backpackers [hostel] now. After I finished work – I used to do security for the *Dandenong Club* when I first got here ... I used to come down [to St Kilda to score] at 4.00 in the morning. [I'd] get home about 5.30 and have a bath. Then the kids will get up and I'd try and struggle through for an hour or so. Then [go to bed and] get up at 2.00. Get changed and do it all again. That was probably for about four months.

[Following that] I was a security officer for the Ministry of Housing [Office of Housing] ... I did my first aid training and got my security licence as well – It's been taken off me because I've been done for criminal stuff – I did that because when I got to Melbourne, I wanted to get the fuck out of the house as much as I could. I had a big pregnant missus and a baby and I had money and time on my hands so I thought I'd do a few courses and that's what came up.

I worked at Atherton Gardens [high rise housing estate]. I worked up to the control room. I was on good money there, say 14 hundred per fortnight nearly seven [hundred] a week. I did nightshifts because I'm a nocturnal person. I was also 'running' for a drug dealer because I only worked four night shifts. I was selling out the front of Safeway [on Smith Street] to the same people I had just broken up in domestics.

Me and [my security partner] used to sit out the front and all these young lads would be sitting around, the heavies, and we're parked in the middle of it, supposed to be the security. We got to the stage there where we were being called to escort people going up to score chuff [marijuana] from the flats so that the other people in the stairwells wouldn't roll them for their money or their drugs. So we're here supporting drugs dealers ... sort of twisted.

I saw quite a few graphic things. There was a woman stabbed that I attended ... and a few domestics that were bloody. One of the little Asian kids kept getting thumped and we certainly intervened in that. It all just got a bit much for me and I started using ecstasy, banging [injecting] pills and everything. That escalated to where I was, on the sly, using say 20 pills by myself over just the four days that I had off.

The obvious effects of Simon's drug use led to his partner's demand that he leave the family home. In addition, she barred his access to their daughters in light of his chaotic drug use. At the same time, the difficulties inherent in juggling his legitimate work commitments with ever-increasing drug consumption led to Simon's dismissal from work and the removal of the last informal (and, by his own account, limited) control on his drug use. Simon's escalating drug use, along with his need for money and estrangement from his partner and daughters, combined to lead him to the 'St Kilda boys.' Effectively, similar to Emily's experiences, the removal of family and work responsibilities allowed Simon to fully indulge his illicit 'appetites'.

[The drug use] was going to my head. I developed a relationship with some people in the towers so they [Office of Housing] thought that I was involved in the drug scene there. They had an inkling that I was a drug user and when they found out that I was Hep C positive, my boss wanted me to do a 'fit-for-work' certificate. I told him to jab it up his arse. He's got old cunts there with pacemakers and shit and they've got me with just Hep C. I was glad to get out of there and my ex-wife - I call her my ex-wife - she was saying that if I didn't curb my drug use, she was going to restrict visits to my kids because it was getting obvious. I was looking gaunt and had track marks. From then on, I had to ring up when [I wanted] to come around. [Previously] I used to just rock up. I used to let myself into her house. She took the key off me ... that was the same week that I got told not to come back to work until I had a 'fit-for-work' certificate ... and this dealer that I was seeing kind of put the brakes on [my drug supply]. All this happened at the same time - I went fuck you all and took off into my own little thing down here. I met up with my circle ... the St Kilda circle boys.

For a number of participants in this project, serious drug habits did not develop until they had spent some time working in the illicit sex industry. Throughout this report, Paxton refers to intermittent periods of drug use, including drug dependencies of varying degrees of severity. However, his increasing involvement with the street scene in St Kilda, and his housing arrangements (Paxton was sharing an apartment with a female worker with a long standing heroin dependency) had been the impetus for increasing drug use and a relatively expensive habit.

**Paxton:** [*The heroin habit is a relatively recent thing?*] Totally. I'm a professional drug user, my whole life but I've been sober for 10 years and not whoring. I wouldn't have been using without doing whoring. How can I put it? There's a reason I make this much money. I'm doing this almost to afford a habit because I wanted to have a habit now. I choose to work. I don't do it because of my habit. I like working and I also enjoy having a habit at the moment because I can afford it. If I couldn't afford it I wouldn't do it, you know what I mean? I've made the decision to do full time work on the street. I make \$3,000 a week and spend \$1500 on smack a week. That's the way it is now.

That's been 8 months and now I'm going to stop working and work privately. There's a reason why I'm going to do that ... so I'm not having to use [heroin]. With [housemate] Alice it's going to be a big thing because I'm not going to use with her. I've got a recent history of being sober. I know how to get into a habit and how not to so I'm having a good time of it. But it's got to a point of 'why am I doing this in the cold for?' The heroin. How tragic is that? Or because I'm making it for two people because someone else is at home [whose habit I have to help cover].

It is less clear when heroin became a dominant part of Mia's life. She has been working in the sex industry since the days of Eaton Square and after a time spent working in brothels, both illegal and legal, she began working the St Kilda streets. Initially, this was confined to Fitzroy and Grey Streets. She suggests that the drug explosion of 'ten years ago', along with increased police activity was responsible for the increase in the numbers of workers and for the street trade being pushed into the residential streets of St Kilda. However, it is not clear at what stage her heroin use began or at what point (and in what circumstances) it escalated.

**Mia:** We seemed to all fit on Grey [St]. If you went down Fitzroy St, you didn't really stand [on the spot], it was more walking along and picking people up. On Grey St we'd actually stand there. It was mainly Robe St, it was happening around there. It didn't go beyond Barkly. I remember working those years and you'd always hang around Fitzroy St and Grey St. I don't know how it moved. There always is [police activity] but it doesn't bother you. Obviously the drug explosion and more girls working. I reckon about 10 year ago, I reckon [the numbers] shot up then.

Regardless of how long Mia had been working prior to developing a large scale heroin habit, it was apparent that, at stages, it had consumed all aspects of her life, reduced as it was to making money, scoring, using (and repeating *ad nauseam*).

Oh, this is fucked. When my mum died, she had money, not heaps but my sister got about 130 grand and I got 43 because I got a lot of money out of mum over the years. I'd ring up and say I need a grand or whatever and she'd give it to me. That money ... money in an addict's hands is not good. I fucking blew 15 grand on heroin. I went and bought an ounce of heroin. It was about July last year and for a month I just basically sat at home banging up, it was bizarre. I bought a car ...



that's all. The rest went on bloody dope. Shocking. I still had seven grand put away for my son 'cause he was in jail. I had 10 put away for him but I kept delving into it. In the end I gave seven grand to a friend to mind so I wouldn't touch it, so I had something to give my son when he got out.

Oh, fuck I was sick [afterwards]. I was so sick. I had never hung out so bad in my life ... I went on and got on bupe [but] it wasn't holding me 'cause I had such a massive habit. I think I was on bloody 38 mils of bupe or something in the end. It was just bizarre. I wish I'd put some of that money away, but I don't care, I don't regret it ... it's like, fuck, I've been through much more money than that, Jesus.

# GOING DOWN THE STREET

STREETWALKING BLUES

- SEX WORK, ST KILDA AND THE STREET

GOING DOWN THE STREET

BLESSINGTON

CHALICE

9



## GOING DOWN THE STREET

The *one* factor each participant in this project has in common is that they all spent time working St Kilda's streets as illicit sex workers. As noted previously, Laura and Simone began their 'working life' on these streets. Others, such as Simon, came to work in St Kilda having worked illegally elsewhere. Potentially, Simon's time spent working 'the wall' in Darlinghurst may have made his return to the street, albeit in a different location, not quite the daunting experience it was for some of those who took part in this project. Simon started working the St Kilda streets prior to severing his employment with the Office of Housing during that period in which his drug consumption began to outstrip his legitimate income:

**Simon:** Sex work is definitely an income thing. Sex work dropped off when I was at home and working in the housing commission ... except when I got a bit out of control because I would get paid and blow that in the first weekend and its another week and a bit til payday.

Despite the nonchalant nature with which Simon talked on his involvement in sex work, his early experiences would not have made for an easy return to the street.

I got raped three times when I started out at 'the Wall'. [I was] too drug fucked on the job ... It was painful, not violent as in punches and physical abuse, [but] being raped. One [assault] was for money. He was a big guy and I think I must have been off my face because I don't know how it really came to happen that he did it, it was a lesson.

Simon often spoke with apparent disregard for his safety and wellbeing. This attitude was certainly reflected in the high-risk drug taking and sex practices that he was indulging in throughout the times we met. However, the violence and trauma that had been inflicted upon Simon began to surface unexpectedly in later discussions, as his veneer of bravado would waver or drop for brief moments. Simon's story is addressed further in a later part of this report.

The reasons that those working in brothels or the escort industry (either legally or illegally) left the relative comfort and security of a brothel for the exposed and unregulated environment of 'the street' also revolved around money. Still aged under 18 years, Riley left the escort agency and went to work on the streets of St Kilda due to the exploitative practices of the management. It wasn't an easy decision, but an experienced co-worker eased his transition by 'showing him the ropes':

**Riley:** I left the agency because the manager ended up owing me so much money on credit card jobs. Cash jobs, you'd get your money straight away. Credit card jobs you'd have to wait a week. She ended up owing me 12 and a half grand and it never came so I quit and started working down the street. That was 12 years ago.

I went into the street work with a bit of trepidation. Luckily I went into it with one of the trannies [transsexuals] from the escort agency. We quit together and she had worked the streets before. She gave me the low down on how different the streets were to agency work ... definitely a lot different.

The advantage of working on the street is that you keep all your money yourself ... that's the only advantage. You don't get as much work and you don't make as much money. The agency I was working for was an established agency and they were quite well known and they had an established clientele. Going down the street, I would initially get a bit of work because I'm a new face and they [the clients] all like 'fresh meat' ... but after a while you're just one of the other boys.

In contrast, Althea and Mia were, initially, able to make significantly more money on the street as opposed to the brothel where they not only had to provide a significant proportion of their fees to management but were also required to work long hours and endure degrading work practices, including being paraded before intoxicated clients. As Althea recollects:

**Althea:** I was working at the *California Club* [on St Kilda Road] at the time. They had a rule that if you worked Friday or Saturday nights, the busiest nights, then you had to work a weeknight as well ... otherwise all the girls would just work Friday and Saturday nights and no one would be working week nights. I worked Friday and Saturday nights so I had to do two weeknights as well. I was sitting in there on a Tuesday night, there were like 12 girls working. The shift started at 8 and finished at 6 in the morning, or something hideous, and it was dead, no one came through the door ...

At about 5 in the morning this guy turned up and asked to meet the girls and we all went in. [The client] can either sit in the lounge where you can talk to the girls for a while, play pool, have a drink or you can have intro only. [Intro only is when] they [the client] sit in this little room and you come in for about a minute and say your little spiel and leave and he chooses a girl. It's a bit more private for the guys, a bit more discreet ... more impersonal though.

So we all went in [for an intro] and met this guy. I was the last one to go in and as each girl came out she said, 'he's so pissed'. I think he chose me because I was the last girl to go in and I was the only one he could remember. Had it have been a busier night the receptionist wouldn't have accepted his money because he was too drunk. The drunker they get the hornier they get, the drunker they get, the less likely they can do anything and drunk guys can become belligerent really easily. One minute they're happy as Larry and then they find out their time's up and they turn from the nicest guy in the world to 'It's your fault, this has never happened to me before'. All that kind of crap.

So, this guy had paid and she had accepted his money – the receptionists get a cut too, \$2 for every half hour and \$5 for every hour, so it's in their best interest to talk guys into booking each girl in for a longer stay – she'd got an hour booking out of this guy, whoopee, an extra \$5 for her. So we all go back into the staff room and they called me out. 'I'm not doing him.' 'But you have to.' 'Stiff shit, I'm not doing him, he's too drunk.' 'If you don't see him then we'll fine you.' 'Simple, I'm not doing him.' 'If you don't do him then you can't work on the weekend.' It was like, 'fine I'll pack my things now.'

I packed my shit and walked out. On the way home that night, I was walking through the [St Kilda] junction and this guy stopped. I was dressed in jeans and jumper. I wasn't in anything provocative ... He asked if I was working and I said I've just come from the parlour. 'Oh, you're not working now?' And I say, 'why?' He said, 'I haven't got much time but I've got \$100 and I just want oral sex, really quickly'. I'm thinking \$100, hasn't got much time, don't have to spend an hour with him. I said, 'oh, come on, we'll go back to my place'. So we went to my place, he was in and out. From the time he walked in the door, got his money out, undressed, had sex, dressed again, out the door, ten minutes. I thought woo-hoo! I walked down to the service station and coming out of there with some cigarettes I got picked up again, exactly the same thing again, another 10 minutes, another \$100.

I had sat there [at the parlour] all night for nothing to get told off and it's taken me less than \_ hour to do \$200. I mean what am I doing working in a parlour? You just have to walk around. So on the weekend I walked Fitzroy St, the junction end of Fitzroy St up to Princess St. I'd just walk up to there and before I got down to the lights at Princess St I'd get a job. Come back, get dropped off on the park side and before I got to the end, get another one. I couldn't believe it and the amount of money I made. I worked from like 10 till 1, \$500 easily. It would've taken me a 10-hour parlour shift [to make that].

I didn't even know how much the girls charged down the street. It was the guys that offered \$100 for oral and sex so I started charging that when they'd pull up and ask prices I think I starting saying \$60 for oral and \$100 for oral and sex and I would get it.

I think because I dressed pretty straight and wasn't in the obvious [sex working] patch, a lot of guys approached me. They approach girls that they think aren't doing it, it's like they want the unattainable and then they'll offer you anything. But if you're out there and you're obvious it's like no [not interested]. I've been walking home with groceries and they want jobs with you. I take out my frustrations on them - 'I'm not working for God's sake! Just because I'm a single female in St Kilda doesn't mean I'm a prostitute you dirty, filthy man. Go home to your wife, you disgusting creature'. 'Oh sorry' and they drive off. Then you feel like saying, 'Come back after sunset. I'll be out there.' Then when you are dressed for work and standing there, they don't come near you.

Mia had left Eaton Place after 1985 to work in a legal establishment. However, it was only for a brief period before similarly opportunistic events led her to 'the street'.

**Mia:** [After Eaton Square was closed down] I just went to another brothel, a legal place just off Toorak Road near South Yarra station. It's still there. I think it's a trannie parlour now. A lot of trannies work there. I was only there 6 months and then I started working the street.

I went to work [at the brothel] one night and there was too many girls rostered on and I couldn't work. I sat there and thought, 'shit, what am I going to do now' and I thought, 'fuck it, I'll go down the street' and that was it. I left my bag there and went and worked the street and made hundreds. I remember I went back to the brothel and got my bags and said, 'See you later, I'm not coming back.' That was it. I started working the streets.

[I didn't know] nobody [on the street]. I met these two chicks that were living on Grey Street and they were working. I went out with them and sort of stood around. I was pretty freaked out. I would've been in my 20s, probably about 24. It was Grey St then, it was Grey St and Fitzroy St that was [the site of sex] working. It wasn't down these areas [in residential St Kilda]. And we all used to work together, the trannies and girls. We all used to mix together. I don't know where the boys were.

An added attraction of 'the street' for brothel workers is the flexibility that comes with freedom from the regulations that the management of licensed brothels impose upon workers. A drug dependency, for example, becomes difficult to hide from managers who ban drug use on brothel premises to avoid criminal liability.

Once they have worked 'the street' for a period of time, a worker invariably meets a number of trusted 'regulars' who will be given a contact number and will arrange meetings away from the street. Other options include advertising for 'trade' in local newspapers or travelling to try one's luck as a 'new face' in other cities.

**Riley:** I have advertised. I advertised for about a year in the paper. I got quite a bit of trade, it was good money actually. I think I stopped when I moved to Sydney. I did my thing there and came back and started working the streets again.

I drove up to Sydney with a friend for three days. Drove up there with just enough money for the petrol and drove back with two and a half grand. I needed some money so thought I may as well go to Sydney.

Working 'The Wall' in [Darlinghurst] Sydney is rough. I know everyone on the streets in St Kilda and everyone knows me. Up there I don't know anyone and they'll rob you as quick as they'll look at you. They'll watch you and see if you get a job and if you get dropped off then they know you've got money on you. I used to always take my money home first and go back [to 'The Wall'] to be safe.

In Emily's case, it was her perceived inability to 'hustle' for custom in the competitive environment of brothels, along with her increasing use of drugs, that led her to leave the *California Club* and begin working on the streets.

**Emily:** [I left Canberra and came down to St Kilda] about three and a half years ago. I worked out in the streets for about six months. It was off and on over a couple of years but if it was back to back it would only be a matter of months out there.

The fact is that [at a brothel] the older you are, the less jobs you're going to get and I wasn't fantastic at it ... I'd be talking to guys in the lounge and I wasn't prostituting enough so I wouldn't make enough money. Sometimes you can pull in 800, a thousand a night, but sometimes you pull in 60. I just didn't hustle ... you have to hustle for a client to pick you up. You can be talking to someone for a bloody hour and then someone else would come downstairs that's been in a job and they walk in the door and the guy would just take off with her.

My heroin use was increasing and the brothel owners, the more reputable ones, if you're too out of it, [they won't let you] do a shift. And you're not allowed to shoot up on the premises. I mean it's like a job. If you clock in and you're doing an eight, 10-hour shift, you're not allowed to leave the premises. It was just as awkward to try and get dope in as any kind of job. And they have locker searches 'cause they lose their licence if you've got illicit drugs on the premises, so I just wasn't able to [keep it up]... I got too messy and had been given chances. I was working up here, the *California Club* ...

Sometimes if we didn't make enough money, a couple of us would finish work about three in the morning and we'd walk down and grab a couple of jobs on the way. That's how it kind of started. I had a friend in the brothel and she'd done a fair bit of street work and we'd come down and hire a motel room during the day just 'cause we could do a job, score, do a job, score.

Janine meanwhile, continued to work in the strip clubs of Kings Cross. It was her work in the peep show environment that brought about her introduction to heroin. The period she describes, in which brothels and other industry operators established de facto injecting rooms has been documented elsewhere.<sup>23</sup>

**Janine:** I stayed in Sydney. I was about 22, 23 years old when I found heroin. I was a late starter. I found my daughter's father. I mean we only slept together a few times but I'd already moved into his place and I found out that I was pregnant and we started using, you know. He's gay basically. I was sort of his experiment with a girl. Yeah, I fell in love with heroin and him ... and it was a love affair that's just gone on.

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<sup>23</sup> See Wodak in Mendes and Rowe (2004).

The using had come with working in the peep show too. I was dabbling<sup>24</sup> then and, like, to get rid of hangovers, it's a great cure ... It actually killed all the pain. All the girls in the peep show used. I just, yeah, slowly got into it you know, but also I was living with someone that was [a user] ... Jamie's father had been a junkie for, like, 15 years. He was a bit older than me. I used to watch and they wouldn't give me any. They'd say, 'Just smoke the dope ...', 'No, I want some of that.' A friend would give me some at the peep show, she'd give me a little bit, you know, and like finally I worked out a way to sneak it, I had to con this guy. My daughter's father and his friends went and bashed him for giving it to me ...

At *Porkys* in Kings Cross where I use to work in the peep show, there was a shooting room upstairs. It's been a shooting gallery for 15 years, you know, and they talk about them just starting. We'd been doing it for years up there. You'd knock on the door after 10 minutes, if they didn't answer then we'd go in ... and you'd find someone blue or find some girl climbing over some guy robbing him. We used to have the pool room next door where they'd buy the smack and then just go next door, pay five bucks, we'd give them the syringe and water and spoon. You know, that saved so many lives.

Circumstances brought Janine back to Melbourne in the late 1990s. She had also brought a heroin habit with her and, by now, no stranger to the sex industry, she began working in a brothel – again the *California Club*. The apparent coincidence that three of the female participants were working in the *California Club* prior to entering the illicit street trade is explained by the fact that it is one of the largest legal brothels in Port Phillip and is located a short distance from the illegal street sex circuit. Further, each of the three participants describe their entry into the street scene in terms that are best described as opportunistic or, in Janine's words, accidental:

It wasn't until I came down to Melbourne that I actually worked on the street. [I worked in St Kilda for] three or four years. I was there [on the street] in '98 I suppose, up until January or February [2004]. I was going up there occasionally until about February when Eddie got out of jail.<sup>25</sup>

[*How did you start?*] It was accidental. [I got picked up] walking home, you know. I was working at the *California Club* and I walked home and I made more money walking up Grey St than I had all night. I thought this is ridiculous, sitting around in ruffles and taffeta, uncomfortable and sleazing on to old guys and saying come upstairs with me. You may as well just stand there and make them make the effort. And you get all of the money don't you?

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<sup>24</sup> 'Dabbling' is a commonly used expression used throughout this report to indicate infrequent heroin use. The equivalent American term is 'chipping.'

<sup>25</sup> Janine's boyfriend Eddie, an immigrant of Arabic background, had a profound dislike of her involvement in sex work. This was despite the fact that she largely supported him financially through this work (when he was not in jail).



I'd go out and make money ... I mean I ended up spending it all on dope anyway ... [I was supporting a habit] so you don't notice the cold so much. [But you still *have* to work]. It's horrible. If you have a night off, you have to go begging credit [off your dealer] the next day.

Paxton's journey to the street took significantly longer. However, his overseas travel involved a great deal of commercial sex work. He would ultimately be away for the better part of nine years.

**Paxton:** I'd never held a straight job in my life and when I went overseas, I realised that, my God, I'd never held a straight job [so I] started whoring overseas, putting ads in the paper for a massage with a boy. I went to Asia first. I just wanted to get out of Australia, so I got a single trip [ticket] to Hong Kong, and go-go danced in drag there for about six months, but went to the phone directory straightaway and got a job as a boy, screwing women, in the day. I did that twice. That's the first time I actually thought about it [doing sex work] because I wasn't here ... I think it's a part of our culture [in Australia]. It's like I can't be known as a dishwasher 'cause I'm known as this. I was immature and young but I that's how I thought. It was a big thing – what other people thought about you. So it was always fake persona stuff going on. That's how I saw Australia. It's why people tripped out with drugs and whoring because if they did it, it was denial [that they were involved in it], or they took it on totally and they lived it all the time and they get spat on by hypocrites.

I went to Asia and danced there for a year. Then I went to San Francisco and started whoring, putting ads in the paper for a year. I stayed in San Fran to visit a girlfriend and then in San Fran I was drug fucked completely. I flipped out for a bit and was into any drugs that came my way. I started shooting speed; I hadn't ever [shot it] before.

Then I lived in New York for six and a half years. When I got to New York, I cleaned up and all I did was escort ... like ads in the paper. I got away from all the drugs and got into working and looking after myself there so it was good. 'Have you ever done an Australian? Big strong hands, gets deep down under'. My hair would be blonde and, 'G'day, mate, how are ya?' I did that for years [until] I got off on the sex thing totally. I started getting good makeup jobs and stuff. Basically I pursued makeup and styling and all that stuff on Seventh Avenue, the fashion district there.

When I came back to Australia, I was [working] in this great show [the US performance artist] Penny Arcade's 'Bitch-Dyke-Fag-Whore' [stage show] – that's how I came back to Australia [as part of the show]. So I was this big wanker, you know, came back successful from New York, this show was a hit of the season, We did the Adelaide Festival and Sydney and Melbourne, and it was great cause I hadn't been home and it's 10 years later and those cultural events had really developed. Like the Adelaide Festival was fantastic. We were paid to stay in a hotel, you do your shows seven days a week and you're in the Actors' Guild together ... it was fantastic.

Coming back here was a real [shock]. My mother and me were totally estranged when I first got back here. It was like, 'You're a fuck up, aren't you?' My friends were dead, AIDS basically, and I had no one to turn to. So I went to Melbourne 'cause Sydney was just too confronting. [Five years later] I went [back] to Sydney [and] started sex working and getting into drugs.

Paxton explains his entry into the street sex trade as research experience – material for a book. At least, this was his first explanation before admitting to the need for money for drugs.

I just went 'do it', you know. I broke up with my boyfriend thinking he was fucked, couldn't emotionally be there for me, he's too immature and I went to Sydney for two years. The book I was writing was about this stuff, so from a healthy perspective, getting it down and getting a book contract, I might get into it. I want to get more information about the actual sex work now where it's at, so I'm going to be a queen, pretend I'm a trannie, work on the street, you know, I'm not going to judge them ... well, actually it was an excuse to go make money for drugs to get high. That was in Sydney. I lost total face because I went from being something special to, 'Oh, Paxton is just a junkie on the street'. If you're someone and you're very Sydney, [and] you're [ending up] on the street, [the attitude is] 'Oh, how tacky'. You didn't talk about being a drug addict or a sex worker 'cause people judge you in Sydney. [But it was] like I'm doing the only real underground thing left. The only real McCoy hardcore city thing. How is it embarrassing? Sex work and it's safe. I mean the police liaison person comes and gives me tea and says, 'How are you? What's your number, honey?'

And it's like I'm on the street, that's what it's at, that's life. It's that straight now. This is who I am and I choose to do this.

The story about how Ollie and Denise came to work on the streets is less clear. Ollie suffers from mental ill health and is on medication. On occasions, she would swing between lucid insights and a separate reality. Consequently, we only met on a couple of occasions and much of what was discussed fell into a 'separate reality'.<sup>26</sup> Denise, in contrast, was a reluctant participant. On the two occasions we met, she was, firstly, heavily under the influence of heroin and, on the second occasion, she was loath to elaborate on her life. While the latter was completely understandable, it did not sit with her stated willingness to participate in the project and we didn't meet on any further occasions.

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<sup>26</sup> Everyone trips out because I got spiders, but no one can see them as yet, but I can in a spiritual way. I know that they're there 'cause they have to be otherwise I wouldn't be here for they are my life. If anyone kills one of the spiders, I'm dead as well 'cause the master created us for a superiority, which is called a safety vision in our eyes. So as soon as something goes wrong, anywhere, we'll see it through our eyes no matter how far we are and we have to travel all the way here to clean the shit up so the next creation can be.'

When I first met Ollie, she had recently stopped working to meet the requirements of a court order. Service providers who know her well acknowledge that Ollie always complies with such orders. She had, however, spent four years working on St Kilda's streets.

**Ollie:** I use to [sex work in St Kilda], but not anymore. I stopped two months ago. I need the money, but I just don't worry about it ... I don't get nowhere. They expect me to do all these things and I'm going to do it for what? 50 bucks, for an oral? I should be charging 120 for that. Just for an oral ... wait until the million dollar girls come in, one of them with a million dollar dress and he's going, 'How much?' I go, 'A million for an hour, darling. Do I look like cheap? Look at my dress; it cost me a million dollars'.

The second time we met, Ollie elaborated on her reasons for not working. However, she also confided what a number of service providers had mentioned – Ollie worked because she enjoyed the sex.

I went back working last week. I went on Saturday or Friday, I can't remember when. I didn't work for three months before that. I didn't have warrants out for my arrest but I'd been put on a good behaviour bond. It didn't say if I kept on working I'd get put in jail. They can't put me in jail. They can only put me in a psych ward because I'm on medication and the medication sometimes makes me turn, especially when I have police officers right in my face telling me to put these handcuffs on. I get violent and, you know, being charged with assaults on coppers [is not good].

I went out [working] last night and, yeah, I came down on the weekend. I made \$200, \$300 bucks. [*What made you come down?*] Sex. I was bored. No one's putting out, they're all teasing me. It's not fair. The one's that want to have sex with me I don't want to have sex with them because I've already fucked them. I can get different clients and get fucked by different people and that's what I like. I don't like to have just one guy, I like to have many.

Denise, like a number of participants, had worked in a brothel, where she remembers being fired for being gay. Her involvement in sex work was a decision of financial necessity. Denise's need for money was primarily related to her use of drugs.

**Denise:** [I work] every day actually. I only work to make the money I need and that's it. [Night or day] it doesn't matter, whenever I feel that I need it. [I've been working] on the street since I lived here ... three years. I worked in a brothel before that. Before that I didn't have to work 'cause I've been in the buying and selling [drugs] game.

[The money in the brothel] is pretty much the same as on the street, it's like 60-40 per cent though. It'd be 200 bucks an hour.

As is apparent from these accounts (and those in preceding chapters), the manner in which each individual in this project came to the St Kilda's streets differed to an extraordinary degree. There is no template, no family background (or lack thereof) and no involvement in a particular lifestyle that leads to illegal and / or commercial sexual activity. The reality is that each of these individuals, who have given of their time and their personal experiences, found themselves 'working the streets' whether to earn money for drugs, to satisfy a need that could not be met by (often absent) family and friends or simply to survive. The following chapter recounts some of their experiences in their working lives. It is by no means a sensationalist account and I have attempted to keep my commentary to a minimum in the interests of allowing the stark reality of their working lives to show through.



# I HAD A PRETTY BAD EXPERIENCE



A HISTORY OF A STREET-BASED SEX WORK IN ST KILDA  
I HAD A PRETTY BAD EXPERIENCE

## I HAD A PRETTY BAD EXPERIENCE

There are few means of earning an income that are as dangerous as illicit street-based sex work. Violence is a daily occurrence and rape is an 'occupational hazard'. The illicit nature of their work means that in the event they are the victims of assault, street workers often refuse to contact police. The violence – mental, physical and sexual – that characterises their work environment is unknown at best and ignored at worst by those within the broader community – at least until a worker is murdered, an event considered 'newsworthy' by the mainstream media. Unfortunately, ignorance is not an excuse that those who make policy, and those who are compelled to enforce it, can use.

### RAPE . . .

After nine years of working the street, Laura had been subjected to a particularly violent and frightening rape. When we first met, she was working with counsellors from the South Eastern Centre Against Sexual Assault (SECASA) to deal with ongoing trauma. She was not working on the street at the time. Her attempts to seek some resolution, and closure, through the Crimes Compensation Tribunal were being frustrated, something that continued to be an issue throughout the seven months we were in contact and that will be revisited in greater detail elsewhere within this report.

**Laura:** I had a pretty bad experience. In August 2002, I got raped by two guys who had a gun at my head and a machete at my throat. They've been caught and they're now in custody. I'm pretty upset with their sentence. They got a very low sentence. One of them got six and a half [years], with four and a half at the bottom [with parole], and the other one got five, with three and a half at the bottom, and there was myself and two other girls ... so they got that for three rapes.

I was a bit upset about that, plus when they got caught, one of them was remanded in custody and the other one was put out on a 50,000 surety. He did a runner but the courts gave back the money to the family. They caught up with him two weeks later in Sydney and brought him back to Melbourne. I thought, 'they're really gonna go hard on him' but that's the one that got the five and the three and a half at the bottom. So I was pretty upset with the sentencing.

For workers, such as Mia, who have spent many years working on St Kilda's streets, incidents of rape and violence have been numerous. What is apparent in her statements, told so matter-of-factly, is that despite being bashed and raped, despite working on nights on which other girls have been murdered, the need to support a 'raging habit' is such that fear for one's life becomes a secondary consideration. Nonetheless, the sense of dread that accompanies the act of getting into a stranger's car is palpable. If nothing

else underscores the fact that, for many on the street, sex work is not a choice but a desperate necessity, then Mia's words should.

**Mia:** I had a gun pulled on me one night. One of the other girls ripped this guy off and he basically wanted what he'd paid for. I said I'll do what you want just fucking put the gun away. He had the audacity to drop me off in the middle of Grey St after we'd done it all. So many guys come down and attack the girls. A lot of these girls wouldn't even report it.

I've been raped on the street, attacked, fucking robbed and, oh fuck, you name it. Every girl out there would have had a bad situation. You just don't know who you're getting in [to a car] with. Half the time it's the guy you least expect. I hate getting in and then you hear that central lock, 'click', and there's nothing you can do. You can't even put anything in the door so it won't lock ... yeah, I've been attacked a few times ... I've had to run from cars and leave my clothes and bag. That's why I tell a lot of girls: 'Don't carry anything when you work, just carry condoms'.

When I've been attacked [I've said I'm never come back to the street], fuck yeah. But you get over it and come back straight away. I've been attacked half a dozen times. I've been raped twice. I don't know what it is because you come close to nearly losing your life. Fuck. I nearly died, shit! I don't know ... you put it in the back of your head and come back out. I've worked nights when girls have been murdered. It does scare you. It does. You think, 'I probably spoke to that guy'. I don't know, I suppose if you've got a raging habit ...

The threat of assault is a reality lived nightly by those working the street. Workers may be deeply affected when a co-worker is seriously injured or killed. It may be because of a personal relationship with the individual in question. It may also be because, when another worker is assaulted or murdered, it doubtless brings home their personal vulnerability to such an attack.

**Simone:** There's that lady that got killed a couple of months ago [Grace Illardi]. I knew her vaguely. She was from Footscray. I only saw her every now and then but you get to know the workers once you've been working for a while. She was in her 30s with three kids. Yeah she was a regular worker. She worked for quite a few years but she didn't work every night. She must have had another job while bringing up the kids and on odd evenings she'd go [to the street]. Her family didn't know she was soliciting. Imagine the shock after she was dead. Then, you know, the way they said it on TV, [she was] a prostitute. They shouldn't have said that because she's got three kids and the kids are going to get picked on at school. They shouldn't say that they should just say a worker. It gave me the shits.

I really got angry because she's the second one that got killed in just over a year. I turned around and I said to [my boyfriend], 'that gives me the shits because men have got a grudge against the world. They're upset with their wife, their girlfriend and they come all the way to St Kilda and think they can rape or kill one of us

because they've got a grudge against the world'. I said, 'society has gone the way of thinking we're trash because we take money for sex but society should know we've got a heart and we're human beings like everybody. What gives everybody the right to come down to St Kilda and rape and kill us because they've got a grudge against the world? What gives society the right?'

As Mia observes, 'you just don't know' who your client is. A violent rape may not occur for nine years, such as in Laura's case, or it may be inflicted upon a worker who has only been working 'the street' for a short time. Simone estimates her working life at 'about a year and a half' spread over three years. However, during this time she was subject to brutalisation, intimidation and sexual assault.

**Simone:** Oh, [I had bad experiences] a few times where you just thought, 'Shut up, just do what they want' because you'd end up being worse off than what you would be. So, yeah, a couple of experiences, but not as many as what the other ladies have experienced in the streets 'cause like I said, I was really picky with who I chose.

[Still], incidents [happened] in the car where they want to do your number two [anal sex]. You say, 'No, no, no!' ... but you're in the back seat having sex and you got nowhere to move, their body's more or less on top of you and they demand it. You're more or less being raped. While you're saying 'no', they're doing it anyway. My philosophy was, 'shut up, just lay down there, pretend to enjoy it, it's going to get over and done with sooner and you're lucky to walk out alive'

Ollie described a particularly violent rape to which a friend of hers was allegedly subjected. Her worker later confided that Ollie had been the victim of an extremely frightening sexual assault. Whether the two incidents were linked (or one and the same) is unknown. However, contradicting her worker's report, Ollie claimed to have never been assaulted herself.

**Ollie:** My girl[friend] got raped. She was bleeding to death in my home. She was passed out, she was gone. I rang up the ambulance 'cause my dad is coming home and goes, 'What the fuck is going on here?' On my window she's going [*knocking loudly on table*] louder and louder and I got out of my psychosis and pulled the windows down and gone, 'Baby, what's the matter?' And before she said anything, she just collapsed. I dragged her in and she's still bleeding. She came out of a coma 'cause I blew mouth to mouth so she came back out of her coma. We took her straight to the hospital.

She nearly died from the loss of blood. Dad goes, 'We'll take her'. So we took her to the hospital. All my towels, I used all his towels too, you know, and she's like dead, half dead. She can't answer me. I'm going, 'What's going on? You're alright?' She couldn't answer me but she told me later. I said, 'You better tell me who did this because I'm gonna go and kill him'.



## VIOLENCE AND INTIMIDATION

In his many years on the streets, Riley has seen violence visited upon others:

**Riley:** I have seen extreme violence on the street. I saw one worker get kicked, almost to death, by a group of like maybe 15. There was nothing any of the other workers could do. If we had run in to try and stop them, they would have started on us. All this poor guy was doing was lying down on a chair. We could see them coming, slowly walking in. I could see them and I told some other workers but we'd forgotten about Jed who was still lying on the chair. We saw them run and we took off, but Jed was lying on the chair and they found him as they were running towards us. They just laid into him and then left. We went back, rang the ambulance and went to the hospital. He was a mess ... it was horrific, horrible. He came back to work. He's got HIV now.

More frightening from a personal perspective, Riley himself has been the victim of at least one potentially life threatening and brutally violent incident.

The worst I've got is my throat cut on a job. He was probably about 38. I took him back to my place, my room. At the end of the job he just turned, went a bit schizo and wanted his money back ... and all of my money as well. I said no and he pulled out a Stanley knife. I said, 'look, fine take my money, just get out of here'. He took the money but that wasn't good enough for him so he cut my throat, 10 stiches.

As Riley's encounter illustrates, workers often bring clients back to a room if they feel it is safe to do so. However, this is obviously a judgement call that may have serious consequences if the wrong call is made. In addition to such an assessment, Riley relies on establishing an early balance of power in his favour. He expanded upon his means of setting these parameters.

You have to be in control of the situation so the client knows you're in control - don't let them take you for a ride because they will. You've just got to be upfront about it. If you seem cold, then that's just the way you have to be - 'I need the money upfront'. As soon as I hop into a car, I try to take control of the situation otherwise it's not going to work in my favour. I suppose it's about attitude. It's letting them know that you know what's going on and that you're not new at all this. You're not going to let them pull the wool over your eyes. Not an attitude like, 'If you don't do what I fucking say, then I'll fucking belt you across the face' ... because you're not going to get a job. But an attitude that says you're in control of the situation, you set the rules and if they want to do something, *you* say 'yes' or 'no'.

Riley, whether by necessity or design, was back working the street soon after he had his throat slashed.

Simon expressed similar sentiments, in terms of an ability to gauge the intentions of the 'mugs' ready to seek his services. When I asked about his ability to distinguish between a potentially violent client from one 'simply' interested in a brief, yet commercial, sexual encounter, he articulated a self-belief that he felt allowed him to tell one from the other. As a heterosexual it was something I was apparently unable to appreciate – I lacked a 'gaydar'. Nonetheless, in elaborating, Simon unintentionally acknowledged that *no* worker could ever make a safe assumption about the clients they were seeing.

**Simon:** Yeah, you can [tell if they're genuine]. It comes with experience I suppose. It's not very often now that I'm worried about the situation that I'm in. There was one that I can think of, not that long ago, this stocky young guy came down in a new Statesmen and he just didn't look the sort, he looked the real hetero bogan. He pulled up and asked and everything, so I went in the car. When we were doing the job in Elsternwick Park, when I was down on my knees I was thinking he could do anything from there. I don't know if I was a bit more psychosed [speed frazzled] or paranoid than normal but I felt really quite intimidated by the whole thing. Nothing happened though ... he actually turned out to be quite sweet.

Simon enjoys, or at least believes he enjoys, a degree of personal physical protection. He is well-built and over six feet of height, enough to dissuade most from attempting to take advantage of him – physically or sexually. Certainly, this is something that hasn't happened since his teenage years working the Darlinghurst 'Wall'. Ultimately, the greatest threat to Simon's health was not posed by 'mugs' but by his own (apparent) disregard for his personal wellbeing.

[I haven't been assaulted] down here. Anyone says the wrong thing, I'm going to fucking slam them, six foot four and nuts. I have had things happen. One night in the Grove, there was this cute boy mincing through the middle of the park into the dark bits, so I'm like 'OK', following him and he spun around with a big six-inch flat head screwdriver. He was going to shiv me with it unless I gave him all my money. I had a good mouth on me though, told him 'dickhead, you think I'd be standing out here in the cold if I had fucking money, I'm hanging like you are.' He said 'I'm not hanging, it's for my girlfriend, I don't want her to work'. I ended up having a chat with him and set him straight. The next car that I knew, one of the old guys who came down regularly, I jumped in and said 'Get the fuck out of here'. That's probably worst that's happened down here.

That happened and, like, when you go to score, guys that think they're king shit stand over you ... it doesn't happen to me really. It will be who they're scoring from or scoring through. They'll just take the money and then not come back [with the drugs] or just take the money and say, 'Fuck off'.

## NARROW MISSES

There are few, if any workers who haven't been placed in positions of vulnerability. Often this is a consequence of intoxication. The cause of intoxication is irrelevant. The fact is that workers may experience complete loss of control. This is not unusual within our community where intoxicating, yet legal substances, place many individuals in situations in which they don't have control over the decisions they make nor the circumstances they find themselves in. In most cases, however, the individual in question is not on a dark street and willing to get into the car of an individual who wants to 'use' you for the purposes of sexual satiation.

**Lisa:** I was standing on Nepean Highway, a guy pulled over and negotiated a price. He wasn't happy with the price, said he'd come back maybe. He came back and I jumped in the car. He said that we'd go down towards Prahran and he wanted oral while driving. When I started to do that, he grabbed my hair and pulled it down the side of the seat. He said, 'You scream or do anything then I'll hurt ya'. I was lucky that I knew where we ended up. We ended up in Burwood, near Warrigal Road. He took me to some house. We found out later on that he didn't even know who lived there. We went down to this garage and I had to perform for him. I thought the only way to get out safely was to do what he wanted. All it was really was that he wanted a job for nothing. Then he drove me back to St Kilda and said that if he ever saw me on the street again he'd kill me ... there was another incident with a girl, Kelly, who ended up getting murdered...

She ended up getting assaulted by the same guy and we thought that her murder was done by him, but we found out later that it wasn't. Like this guy's trying to say that it was all consented and all that kind of stuff. The cops said they've got a lot of evidence on him but they're just trying to get a little bit more ... 'cause he's done that quite a few times.

**Ollie:** I've been half kidnapped, but then I realised what was going on, so I jumped out quick. [It doesn't happen often with me], thank God. They all look at me and go, 'Nope, that's danger'. This weird guy, he's alright when you're looking at him, outside of the car, and as soon as you jump in ... [he said] it's half an hour away. Half an hour became nearly two hours drive. I said, 'You kill me, you're gonna be in a lot of trouble, you'll be bringing me back to life'. I said, 'anyway, I've got 10 picks [syringes] on me, alright.' I opened up one, got it ready, took the cap off, and said, 'If you really want this in your eyeballs keep driving, but if you don't stop the car and let me out' so he let me out.

Fuck knows [where we were]. In the middle of nowhere. Lucky there were coppers, just up the corner, coming down, and they noticed me. I had my leggings, like, split 'cause I accidentally split them and they looked at me and go, 'No, she doesn't live here' and I had a warrant out for my arrest for prostitution. I didn't know nothing about it, otherwise I wouldn't have been working

**Janine:** I had a couple of fights along the way but nothing really like a major sort of thing. I mean if you scream loud enough, everyone gets scared. Just scream your head off and they sort of run – which is understandable.

It's pretty dangerous [though]. Three or four prostitutes have died in Melbourne, girls on the street like Kelly Hodge. The guy that killed that Kelly Hodge, he was telling Eddie, my boyfriend [in prison], he said, 'I just went too far, I had an orgasm, I came and I, like, strangled her. I just lost my brain.' He's running around mainstream [jail population] you know. I find it hard to believe that any guys would cop that, like, you pig how could you do it? Somehow Kelly's name came up and that's what the guy said.

I don't understand the fact that some [girls are prepared to be dominated]. You know, you're blindfolded and being submissive, too scary. It's not always so easy [to maintain control of the situation]. Once you are in the car you're sort of trapped. You're not in full control anymore. You hand over a bit of control when you jump in the car.

**Althea:** I've had them turn nasty but I'm pretty good at nipping them off at the pass. I've learnt to tell which ones [are trouble]. I won't see the young drunk ones. If they don't fall into that obvious category when you meet them you learn as you get older. I'm a bit more experienced with people in general I think. A lot of the young girls get attacked or they get into trouble. They get into trouble more often because they didn't have the gift of the gab, they don't have diplomacy skills – they haven't learnt that. When you're young, you think you know everything. 'I'm 18, I've been around.' You have that smartarse attitude. A lot of girls do that and it's not the way you do it. You've got to head them off at the pass, compliment them a bit, boost their male ego. It helps a lot. It's amazing how you can get out of so many things by stroking that male ego. Sorry James, but you guys are pathetic. It's so sad.

A number of workers rely on their 'instinct' to prevent their involvement with potentially violent clients. Obviously, however, one's instinct's are not always accurate and, as Mia noted above - 'Half the time it's the guy you least expect.'

**Paxton:** No [nothing dangerous has happened] because you get very instinctive, you suss out someone straight away with certain questions. Nice questions that don't seem that [interrogative] way. Someone treating me like, 'come on babe I'm going to offer you this, it's your last chance.' I can tell that's someone I don't want to go with, I don't want to spend physically intimate time with anyone with an attitude of 'You should be grateful, you're just a whore, you just want money.' That's how a lot of guys think. I won't go with them. I'm with people that [are] like, 'oh, you're attractive and I like you and you're not just a hole. I like the person, you're sexy and you've got sex appeal'. Through responses to questions, I can suss people out

I think it's a real fallacy [about the violence of the street sex trade]. People who get themselves into trouble are doing stupid things. There are obviously rules on

the street: [e.g.], you don't go in a car with three people. You've got to be very selective, you can't just go with anyone. If you've got some agenda like, 'I want a hit' you'll go with anybody [including] those cunts that are going to hurt you, the ones who are going to say, 'no condom, full sex \$30' and you go, 'I'll think about it'. When they finally come back they've got no respect for you anyway. It's a power trip for people that hurt you. God knows there's plenty of people out there like that. I see them every night. I tell them to fuck off.

This is particularly important for Paxton who, though he has had no surgery done and is effectively working as a transvestite, works the transsexual 'beat' in St Kilda. There is always the danger of being mistaken for a woman, a mistake that could end in a confrontation.

If they respond weird it's because think I'm a girl and I've taken them home. It's happened a lot to me down here. I'm in the trannie section and someone's driving around and I'm next to 7-foot trannies with tits hanging out and I just assume they know it's the trannie section. I've got make up on to start with, top to toe glamorously put together, no attitude and we're speaking properly. Then when I get them home and they didn't know I can tell, they sincerely didn't know, that's borderline, 'oh, shit' to me, but I've already got them that far and I've already sold them the story [so] I use it.

He could be completely, utterly straight, conservative and never sexually considered a guy. It's like, 'right, how do I get myself out of this situation?' I'll say how many trannies have you been with? Or because I did this commercial on telly I'll say, 'did you see my commercial?' I'll break it that way. If I'm ignorant of them not knowing and they've gone to [touch you] and I've got a cock and it's semi-hard it's like 'oh'.

Their reactions are 'What?' Never angry but [shocked] 'what!' and they're trying to get [all manly], because obviously they think you're a girl they think you're a hot little punk, to find out that you've got a cock just does not compute. So then I do the full, 'baby I don't try to pretend to be a woman so if you want to cancel ...' as much as I hate it because we've wasted time getting here and I've done this spiel, which is worth an Oscar as far as I'm concerned. I'm just going to go back there with no money.

## RIP OFFS

Many 'mugs' who may be less inclined to violence and intimidation to gain the services of workers without payment will resort to financial deception so as to satisfy their sexual urges without providing anything by way of payment.

**Lisa:** One time I was here in the morning and a businessman pulled over in a Mercedes. I jumped in [and] he pulled out an envelope with about \$120 in it. We negotiated what we would do and we went to Elwood Beach. He handed me the envelope and said, 'Just put it in your bag'. I've opened it and he had about five orange pieces of paper the size of \$20 notes in place of the money he'd showed me. So we started arguing about that. He reckons that's what I looked at in the car in the first place ... but I got away from that one.

Believe it or not, it's the white collar guys that are the dangerous ones. They seem to be the deviant ones that end up wanting kinky things or, if they've paid for you, they want everything basically. They think that they own you. Yeah, the labourers and that, they're the decent ones ... they just want a decent service, no hassles. They want to be able to go home to their families or whatever. Yeah, it's the richies that want no condom and everything.

These sentiments about just who the worst offenders were shared by Mia, the most experienced of the workers who participated in the project.

**Mia:** They'll try everything. I've been caught with dud cheques, photocopied money ... I even gave a fucking prick change. [*Laughing*] He gave me a hundred dollar note and I bloody done me service and gave him 40 bucks change. It's dark, you think, 'It's alright, it's money, yep, put it away'. He dropped me off and then I knocked off and went down to Fitzroy Street to buy some smokes and a pizza and the guy goes, 'I can't take this'. I said, 'What's the matter with it?' He goes, 'I don't know, you just have to take to the bank'. I went to *Toppolino's* [pizza restaurant], tried again, no, went out to the car and said to my friend, 'What's wrong with this bit of money?' He looked at it and just peeled it apart. That's still happening.

They've got a lot of tricks up their sleeve, they really have. I found your money comes from the blue-collar workers. You don't get money from these rich guys. None of them. I don't like doing 'suits'. I don't like their attitude ... they don't pay well. Occasionally you get one but I find most of it comes from, you know, plumbers and builders, blokes like that.

**Emily:** I've been ripped off ... I've done the job before getting the money. It's happened to me twice and, god, you feel like a dickhead afterwards. You're meant to be this seasoned campaigner, streetwise girl, and you're standing in the middle of nowhere, with a rip in your stockings and not even money for a fucking phone call. Sometimes men are really nice out there, and you want them to be nice, you want to trust them. It's almost like there's a chance that you're going to get ripped off but you set yourself up, like, 'come on mate, I need trust in the human race again, prove me right. There is hope.' So you set yourself up to be let down.

Conversely, a number of more experienced workers acknowledge that the working girls themselves are just as likely, if not more so, to rip off clients. While this is invariably a reflection of the desperate need for money, the consequences, in the form of physical retribution can be potentially devastating.

**Janine:** It's the girls who rip off the guys most of the time. I find that people who say, 'He did this and did that', it's the girls that have done the wrong thing. Like anything from leaving him posted, with his pants down. 'I've just got to go to the toilet, honey.' Yeah, not even get to the start of the job, you know. 'You just take your clothes off I'll just be back in a second'.

You'd think [workers would get nervous about clients looking for them] but they don't really care at the time, you know. They think, 'I'll just rip this person off for a few hundred dollars.' It would take \$100 for anyone to get stoned nowadays. It doesn't happen easily, the dope's not that good. It's a waste of money spending money on dope.

Althea elaborated on the tendency to 'rip off' clients. A long established worker who relies on a number of regular clients to ensure a steady income, she sees the activities of young workers as defeatist in terms of providing for a source of income.

**Althea:** I don't understand a lot of girls down here ripping guys off and then wondering why they don't get regulars. [Sarcastically] Gee, I don't know, maybe because you rip off just about every guy that you see.

If they *don't* rip them off then it's 'hurry up, hurry up' you know? A lot of guys go down and they'll pick up really young, pretty girls and the girls will be nice to them. 'Do you do this, do you this?' And, 'yes' she'll kiss, 'yes' she'll do oral without a condom, 'yes' she'll do anal, 'yes' she'll let them go down on her or whatever – all these little extras so he thinks he's in for the lot – when it comes to it, it's like, 'no if you want to kiss me it's like an extra \$50' or 'if you want to do anal it's \$200' or 'if you want to go down me it's an extra \$100'.

In that respect, it's a rip off ... Instead of saying 'yes, I do this but I charge extra for it' they imply that it's included in the \$100 for the basic oral sex. That's a rip off in itself.

Another popular one at the moment seems to doing oral in the car with the guy sitting on the seat, his pants around his ankles. While she's doing it, she reaches into his pocket, takes out his wallet, empties the wallet of money, puts the money in her pants or bra, whatever, and puts the wallet back in his pants. He might feel a bit of movement around the ankles, sometimes when I'm doing that, I'll put my hand on the ground and I'll make it known that I'm not near his pants, I'm like balancing on the floor. Anyway, [the guy being ripped-off] he'll pull his pants up and feel his wallet, 'wallet's there everything's cool', and then maybe next morning, he's on his way to work and wants to fill up with petrol and ... no money.

In one respect I find it quite incredible, quite talented to be able to do this but in another respect it pisses me off because they do it and it gives us all a bad name. One day I could get bashed because he thinks it's me. I got attacked once because this girl ripped off this guy a week before. He couldn't find her, but I kind of looked like her and I probably ripped someone off so it makes things even [in his mind].

A lot of the girls that do this, rip off the guys, they skite [boast] about it. [I ask] 'aren't you afraid that some guy's going to get you back.' 'Oh no, I can look after myself, I'd remember them'. I can't even remember someone that I fucked the night before how can you remember someone you've just ripped off? They all blur, especially if you've ripped off so many guys. I mean you're doing orals, you don't pay too much attention to their heads - only the other head I guess - 'I can't recognise you, take your pants down, oh now I know who you are.'

He might not even come by himself he might come with a friend, point you out and then get his friend to drop him at a lane and go and pick you up and take you to the lane. You can't say, 'I can look after myself, I can defend myself, I've got a knife on me.' Most of the girls that get attacked are attacked by a guy by himself. It's not very rare but it's less often that girls are attacked by a gang of guys. Stupid. And like I said, it's not exactly conducive to bringing in regulars.

## I WAS MORE WORRIED ABOUT COPS

Complicating the issue of sexual and physical assaults against those working the streets are tensions between police and workers. When I asked Lisa, a young and petite woman, whether she had experienced any threats or intimidation from other workers, she was quick to reply that she was more concerned about the potential threat posed by police. At first, Lisa was merely referring to police doing their jobs (i.e. enforcing a law that prohibits soliciting as criminal behaviour). However, the behaviour of certain officers, as she elaborated, could potentially be seen to be harassment.

**Lisa:** I was more worried about cops than girls. A couple of times I got pulled up for loitering, 'What are you doing? Why are you standing around here?' You can't always tell them that you're waiting for a taxi or something 'cause they don't believe you. You used to get a warning. Once I got a radio check done and I had an outstanding warrant for a fine [for soliciting] that I hadn't paid and then it was escort back to the cop shop to get the warrant executed and then you're allowed to leave.

At times the police are real smartasses. Some of them are out to get you. I can't even remember who's who now, but it used to be if a certain cop saw you, he'd chuck his lights on, harass you. A lot of the female [officers] were pretty tough, more than the guys. Some of the guys were quite good. A lot of girls were the ones that wanted to get the girls back to the station and charge them and everything.



Riley has experienced a distinct difference in his dealings with regular Victoria Police officers and, particularly, the members of the Gay Liaison Unit. His experiences were echoed by other participants. The following occurred after Riley had his throat cut.

**Riley:** I was panicking and didn't know what to do. The last thing I was thinking was to run after him. What happened? What did happen after that? I did call the police. At first the 'police' police came, and they were just bastards. Basically, 'serves you right'. I said, 'I don't want to speak to you. I want to speak to the Gay Liaison Police'. By law they have to have them come over. And so the Gay Liaison Police came and rang the ambulance.

Experienced workers, such as Mia, believe the police attitude towards workers has improved considerably. She recounts bitterly the occasion of her first rape on the streets and the police reaction:

**Mia:** The first time I got raped I went to St Kilda Police Station. It was years ago ... I went in and they said, 'Well, fuck, what do you expect? You're a fucking prostitute'. I just went, 'See you later'. That's why half the time you don't bother. That would have been eight year ago.

Later, however, she drew a distinction between the police of 'eight year ago' and those who currently patrol the sex work circuit, acknowledging, 'The police aren't so bad [now]'. Indeed, protocols have been established between the local police and RhED to ensure better relations between sex workers and law enforcement officers.

## YOU CAN'T MOVE AN INSTITUTION

Given the incidence of violence on the streets and the relatively recent (and highly publicised) proposals to introduce 'tolerance zones' in areas of street sex work in St Kilda, many workers have an opinion on the merits or otherwise of a proposal which, if successful, would have allowed them to solicit for trade, free from prosecution, in designated areas. Further, it was proposed that safe houses be managed by licensed proprietors in accordance with strict regulatory conditions. As noted in the introductory section of this report, despite the government's initial support for the proposals – this support was subsequently withdrawn (in the weeks prior to a state election). Nonetheless, the issue is not closed as far as many are concerned.

**Mia:** I wonder if [the issue of prostitution] will ever come up again [in policy circles]. I mean it just can't continue. It's not getting any better. The girls are getting younger and less experienced. My friend's daughter is working on the street. I don't think she's even 15. She's a baby. She doesn't live with her mum anymore. I actually saw [her mother] the other day and asked her how old [her daughter] was and she said 15. She knows she's working.

She was living in one of those houses where they've got to have a youth worker. Five people live there. She was living in something like that but she's probably living with a bloke now. Clients probably would have grabbed her. Not that he'd be living off her but you know what I mean. He'd be getting his freebies.

Simone was of the opinion that, while certain measures were commendable, there was little that could be done to ensure the safety of workers in what remains an illicit and, consequently, unregulated work environment. Her views are indicative of the 'fatalism' that sits at the back of the mind of most workers, regardless of whether they are willing to acknowledge its presence or not.

**Simone:** [Street sex work] will never be made safer ... never. I reckon they should try but realistically it will never be made safer because once you're in a car ... I've told you about my sticky situation, 'shut up Simone, just give them what they want' ...

Lisa noted the girls' past attempts to establish an element of security by taking over a derelict house and providing rooms, for a small fee, where workers could take clients.

**Lisa:** Getting a brothel opened up, a room where the girls could pay ... We did something like that about 18 months ago, you know the old nursery on Inkerman Street? Close to it there's an old house, run down, it was a squat basically and about 10 of us used to go there. It was the spookiest, dirtiest place you could imagine but we used to take clients there and pay as we went in, \$5 at the door. One of the girls and her boyfriend basically started it off so. The cops ended up closing it down, putting boards up and wouldn't let anyone in there but that was the stage when there were squats everywhere around St Kilda so you could go anywhere. Now they've either been finished with renovations or people live in them ... they're not there any more.

This has been a practice in Sydney for some time with both legal and illegal safe houses operating. As Janine recalled:

**Janine:** I was talking to Eddie last night and we were saying in Sydney, they have William St, like little houses that were set up as brothels, even the décor was brothel. You'd go in there and pay \$10, \$15 for \_ hr or an hour or whatever to use the room. So they were in the atmosphere of a brothel, the door would be knocked on after \_ hour or so [to ensure everything was alright]. It seemed to work quite well. They had quite a few houses in the city like that.

I don't think they were [legal]. Just [run by] different entrepreneurial women who've got a house. Like why get \$120 a week rent or \$200 when you can get, if you've got 5 bedrooms going, you're coming out with a couple of thousand a night ... minus staff and all that sort of shit.

The original proposal to establish tolerance zones was defeated, in part, because influential residents in designated streets were vocal in expressing their fear of losing local amenity. Although the proposal to establish tolerance zones was defeated, the sex work continues (and residents' amenity continues to be affected) in these areas:

**Simon:** You can't move an institution. It won't work [putting it in another area] because we're not going to move. Unless they actually had a good think about it and made around the Grove a part of it.

The amenity issue is an important one. It is certainly an issue that workers acknowledge. The lack of facilities means that many workers are forced to use residents' properties to relieve themselves. Further, sexual activity takes place in public.

**Mia:** When you're working the street at night, there's nowhere to go to the toilet. I brush my teeth and wash my hands in people's front yards, piss, shit, because the only pub open is the *Newmarket*, and straightaway, 'No, sorry [you can't use the toilets]' 'cause they think you're gonna have a hit. I mean when I'm out working, my morals don't go out the window ... maybe a few of them do, but if I go into someone's front yard, I always shut the gate, I don't leave shit there.

... There's nowhere to do your clients, so you're doing it in their cars. They don't care either. I think they get off on people watching them. I'm not worried about where we do it, doesn't worry me. Quite often you get guys on foot when you're working ... a lot of us work in the bushes. We used to have a mattress in the Botanical Gardens 'cause when you get a guy on foot, there's nowhere to go. You just go to the nearest lane, drop your daks, bend over and whatever they want, you know, because you're only thinking of the money, who cares if someone is watching. It's quite bizarre in summer - because it's so hot, you get a lot of guys on foot, so you're nicking off to a block of flats and go around the back and fucking doggy style or whatever. That's why there's gates, like if you noticed all the high fences in St Kilda. All the gates. That's why. It's unbelievable...

One issue that was raised was the perception that clients' would be reluctant to use safe houses. This was, in large part, attributed to the anonymity afforded by the unregulated street scene.

**Lisa:** I think [a safe house] for working girls would be good but when that was getting debated, when I was working, I used to ask the clients what they thought ... A lot of them said no because a lot of them are happily married and they don't want to be seen. It's going to be known that that is a prostitute house, they'd let it be known on television, on the news. So women are going to know that's in St Kilda or that's in Inkerman St. They might happen to drive past and recognise their husband's car outside and say, 'well he's never in St Kilda, is he in there?' I know a lot of guys who wouldn't go there for that reason, that's why a lot of them go in the car.

They also don't want to go where other people are ... a lot of people want privacy where they know they are not going to be disturbed and no one is going to see them. In one of those places [safe houses] that won't be the case.

# THE STREET'S ABSOLUTELY CRAP

STREETWALKING BLUES  
- SEX WORK, ST KILDA AND THE STREET  
THE STREETS ABSOLUTELY CRAP



## THE STREET'S ABSOLUTELY CRAP

Although an all too regular (and preventable) occurrence, street-based sex work is not simply defined by murder, physical and sexual assault and financial scams. As with a legitimate job, many workers find the routine of the working life a mundane fact of life. That said, it remains a life that is unknown to the greater majority of the public whose experience of illegal sex work is defined by the black and white terms of the popular press. Further, what is seen as mundane, or 'the everyday', to workers, is far from the conventional routines that many of us go through (or endure) on a daily basis. The weekend (at least as a time to relax and rest) is an unknown concept to many sex workers. The following excerpts provide some insight, albeit limited, into the working lives of those individuals who gave so readily to this project.

**Mia:** It's funny –now that I'm older, I don't attract older guys. I attract younger guys. The older guys go for the young girls and the young guys seem to go for the older ones. The young girls could pull in good money, but that's not what I hear out there.

**Emily:** The weather starts getting good and there's a bit of an [influx]. Some people are strict about their corner and decide to get all funny about it. It depends how people are travelling. There's no rhyme or reason. If someone is travelling badly, suddenly their corner is an issue. It's like someone goes up to another girl to rip her head off and five minutes later they're best friends. It's like the real world in a way.

**Simone:** I would work every night for about three weeks and then I would feel just that tired. There was never just one night [of work]. It was day/night, day/night, day/night non-stop. Then after three weeks or whatever, I'd feel so tired I'd go home and hibernate for about three weeks. I wouldn't tell anybody and then I'd come back. 'Gee, Simone, we thought you were dead or in jail'. More so in summer. In the winter, when it was raining I thought I'd rather starve than go out and get a cold for money. But in the summer it was good. From Spring onwards, business, business, business all the time. Not always ... sometimes you'd be standing there all night and not get a job.

You get funny people. I'm not one to pick on people but everybody has got their own way of having sex and that. [One client] stripped himself naked and then he had me put lube on him, all over the body and he turned around and said 'don't I look good Simone?' I didn't have to do anything. I got paid \$50 for that for about 15 minutes, alright your 15 minutes is up sweetie. There was one time I worked on Christmas Day because I knew I'd get money. I was out there for about 2 hours and I made about \$500 then I decided to go home. All the workers said 'nobody will want people [today]' but as soon as I got there ... they were there. There was one strange one for hand relief, he took me behind a flat for hand relief and then he tore this branch off a tree and he said 'can you whack me on the arse' and I'm

whacking and he said 'harder' so whack, whack, whack. A lot of people, they do it their own privacy, but over here we hear more of it. In St Kilda I saw things no normal person would see. It is common but it's not advertised.

I had another request once to give a man a golden shower and I said 'no thank you I'm not that [way] inclined'. And one man turned around and he goes to me, 'do you 'fist'?' I said what and he goes [*gestures – 'fisting' refers to inserting a first in the women's vagina*]. I said 'no thank you.' He kept coming back, hoping that I'd change my mind. I turned around and said to him, 'I'll say this as nicely as I can. Why don't you bend over, get your fist and do it to yourself'.

**Riley:** On the street, you're looking at 60 dollars for oral, 120 or 150 for sex, depending what you can get out of them. Guys normally charge 50 for oral to 100 for sex. I charge 60 and 120 but I usually try to get 150 out of them. Or I charge 150 for an hour.

The clients? I call them mugs, ugly mugs. I suppose the actual people have changed but they're still the same *type* of people. The ages would range from 16 to 80 years, although probably more so between the ages of 35 to 50 years. The typical mug is probably gay, professional, lonely. Definitely more so a gay clientele than the family man. The family man sort of guy tends to go to 'beats' rather than see a prostitute ... I don't know why.

**Althea:** Every time a young guy pays you a compliment, it's because he wants something. Often young guys if they're 'speeding' [on *amphetamines*] or drinking ... it would just be oral in the car for \$50 and then they start saying, 'oh you're gorgeous, you're really sexy' all that crap. Then it's, 'I really want to fuck you'. And I'm like, 'sure love it's a \$100 for oral and sex and since your oral is almost finished you just pay me another \$100 and we can do it.' 'Oh, no, what me pay for it? Come on, you're gorgeous. I'd give you the best sex you've ever had.' 'You don't know what sex I've had and obviously I've had a lot of sex mate ... the likelihood of you being the best is pretty slim'

The same half dozen cars drive around in circles, the odd police car, and every now and then a different car would drive through ... and that was it. The same morons doing 'loser laps' for hours on end. It's, like, fuck haven't you got a life? I mean I'm down here trying to earn money what the fuck's your reason?

Lunch time they go down there [too]. They might work locally and they go for perv laps. On their way home from work, instead of driving down St Kilda Rd then down Carlisle Street or down Barkly St, they'll go [to the 'working' streets] in the hope of having a quick perv which is a bit pathetic. You'll get more cars doing that in summer because the girls are wearing less. Ah, you men.

**Paxton:** What I do is usually work 9:30, 10 till about 12:30 – 1:00 and then I'll take a break. I go home, usually sleep 2 or 3 hours until about 4 and then go out until sunrise. I'll go to bed at 7:30 or 8:00 in the morning and I'll wake up at 5 or 6 o'clock. I get plenty of sleep. Heaps.

I'm using [heroin] at the moment so it does [run you down]. It's hand in hand with working. Trannies don't use [heroin], they'll only use speed. I don't use that. I've been getting into smack – it's more of a girl thing. Like why do girls work? For their habits. Trannies are usually working because they couldn't get a job at *Blockbusters* and essentially to pay for their plastic surgery and their lifestyle, which is shopping.

Despite, or perhaps because of the routine and monotony of their daily lives, a number of workers spoke positively of relationships with 'regulars' and of the 'mugs' in general:

**Janine:** I haven't worked at all... oh, actually, I did my one regular jobbie – he's like a \$70 head job out the back. Pocket money. He rang on Friday night and Eddie was passed out ... he didn't even realise I'd got the phone call [*giggling*]. [I've] gone out the back after searching around for condoms madly, 'cause I don't carry them on me. If Eddie finds them in the house, he'll go, 'What are these? If you're not working, then why do you need these?' So I'm searching for these condoms while he's passed out. I mean the phone rang twice, he hasn't even woken up to that, and I've gone and locked the door and snuck out the back and got \$70 and come back. The man actually said, 'Why have you got your pyjamas on?' I've gone out in moccasins, you know, and pyjamas. I said, 'They're nice and silky and soft'.

He's great. He drives a truck and because he can't park anywhere, you know, he just comes in to my place and gives me \$70 and you know, like I'd give him a little massage. He didn't have much time [the other night] 'cause he has to take the truck back. I know a phone call about 20 to 9.00 means he's in a rush. It's perfect, you know, like every Thursday, Friday. It's been for years. Oh, beautiful guy. I like him as a person as well. I said to him, 'I missed you last week' [*laughter*]. Not just the money, I miss him as a person, like he's funny. I had to put him off twice because Eddie was like standing in the background.

**Althea:** A lot of guys come down the street because it's quick and anonymous ... most of [the mugs] are pretty cool. The majority of guys are pretty cool. They're not scum baggy or anything like that. I think a lot of guys come down the street because it's a last minute thought whereas a parlour they've got to think about it a bit more, plan and make sure their money is on them and go down there and pay upfront and all that kind of stuff. I mean you still have to on the street but a lot of guys drive around and then go, 'oh, we've just got to go via the bank first. 'Yeah, that's fine.' And they're in the safety of their own car. It's sort of like a safety cone in that car, you don't have to get out of it and go into an establishment or find out where that establishment is and find parking. They're just driving home, like sometimes they might be driving home from the city ... I think it's more spur of the moment in that respect.

**Simone:** My regular clients, it wasn't wham, bam, thank you ma'am. I spent time with them because a lot of them, it was for the company. They want someone to talk to about their problems. Us ladies do keep secrets. We don't know where they live – we don't want to know where they live. It's someone to talk to and I've always been a good listener, even before I started working. It was someone to talk to and be with for a cuddle. There were clients that I didn't even do anything with. They paid me for talking, just for someone to be with and talk to about troubles with their wives – blah, blah, blah.

Although some workers acknowledge that they have decent clients, others, cannot conceal the disdain they feel for the type of men who elect to see street-based workers as opposed to visiting the safer and more hygienic premises of licensed brothels. When I first met Emily, she had left street work behind and was enrolled in a tertiary institution while working in service provision for sex workers. This has allowed a degree of contemplative insight into her former working environment:

**Emily:** Street work sucks. ... Street work is sleazy and horrible. The guys from the street don't want to acknowledge that they're seeing a prostitute, they look down on them. If you go to a brothel, you're acknowledging that you're going to a place and paying for sex because it's formalised. If you're picking a girl off the street, I think there's some kind of denial that they're actually doing it so you get more of the not-quite-there guys and the guys who don't have much money and want a lot. And you're trying to find places to do it and taking them back to their place and then you're in a position where you can be taken advantage of. It's like out on the street you don't even have to acknowledge that the person is a human being that you're doing it to. Get them [the girls] to do what you want, wash it off and go home to your wife and kids. It's disposable out there.

In a brothel, it's a place of business and you have managers. There are rules, there are boundaries. [As a client] you may only be paying \$40 more for what you're getting out on the street *and* you're getting security, you're getting girls that have VD checks and bring in certificates [confirming their health checks]. I think the guys out on the street don't want to have to obey the rules ... and because they are looking for more vulnerable girls that they can overpower.

In the same way that members of the broader public see sex workers in accordance with stereotypes, sex workers can stereotype other workers, female street-based workers are sometimes perceived by transsexual and male workers as drug dependent 'junkies'. As alluded to by Paxton, transvestite and transsexual sex workers see a clear sense of separation between themselves and workers who are supporting a drug dependency. Some, such as Tina, hold the latter in contempt.

**Tina:** People see the junkies [when they see sex work in St Kilda]. They don't see some of the [transsexual] girls. [The transsexual girls] have got houses, they travel every year, they've got investments ... but they see us as that Grey Street [type of drug-dependent sex worker].



The police are excellent with us, they know we're down there to work, we not there to [steal] we're down there to work and survive. [Sex work] is just one part, this is just the survival side. There's so many other angles [to being a transsexual].

Half of the problem, why the money for the St Kilda transsexuals is going down is because of people lowering their prices. For us, that makes it really hard. But like [my friend] Neela and me, we stick to our prices and we get the clients we deserve. The Grey Street side [of sex work], they do it for ridiculous prices and I've got no pity for them. One: try and help yourself; two: life's hard; three: don't use your habit as an excuse. I'm not against them. What they do is what they do but don't do it in front of me. I've got no sorrow for them because they're the one's that have made the business bad today.

Similarly, male workers distinguish themselves from female street-based workers. However, rather than drug use, they base the distinction on the sense of community that they see as existing amongst 'the boys':

**Simon:** All the boys down here, we all know each other and we'll look out for each other ... or we'll all really fucking backstab each other. It depends on which way you're facing. Eighty-five per cent [of the boys would work for money for drugs]. There's probably about a dozen who are the staunch Grovers [who work Shakespeare Grove and the surrounds] and I'd say 10 of them work for party drugs money. Everyone whacks them, no one snorts. We even bang pills down there.

While it is a cliché to a certain extent – a loose camaraderie *does* exist between many of the female workers as Jem articulates – 'you do feel a part of something down here working. It's the only thing that I find hard to let go because I do feel like I'm a part of something. As fucked up as it sounds it's the hardest thing to actually let go' – it is also a fact that some female workers are 'territorial' particularly given the perception, during winter months, that there is less 'trade' to be shared.

**Laura:** I don't get involved in the politics. I find it really stupid. The other night I saw these two girls screaming at each other over a corner. At first I thought they were arguing about something different and I found out it was because one girl had been standing there and she'd gone off with a guy and she'd come back and this girl was standing there and she said this is where I stand and they were both pulling at each other and I'm standing across the road ... I ended up walking off. I thought, 'God no one's going to pull up with these girls screaming they way they are'.

Perceptions of the extent to which such incidents occurred varied. Nonetheless, it is something that most workers associated with the more experienced workers.

**Althea:** [If you get caught out you used to get a beating]. That unfortunately doesn't happen as often as it used to. A lot of the old girls aren't there any more, the old rougher ones who were in and out of jail. They're all inside I think. There might have been ['top dogs'] in the old days but not now. All that stuff about,

'you're on my corner fuck off!' That doesn't happen. Although the other night I pushed this girl off my corner, because I've been on the same corner for years, off and on, whenever I've worked.

## SEXUAL HEALTH

In late 2004, the workers both male and female were finding it difficult to attract clients. The reasons were unclear and certainly at the time of writing (mid-late 2005) this no longer seems to be the case for female workers. One danger that accompanies periods in which 'trade' is hard to attract is that workers may drop their prices (attracting the wrath of other workers).

**Simone:** You have to stick up for yourself out there. There was a few times I could stick up for myself but it was nothing really physical. Cassie, I've seen her smack a lady in the face ... a few ladies charge the clients less for sex and then the clients will come to one of us and say, 'how much do you charge for sex?' \$80 straight, \$100 with oral. Then the clients would say, 'but last time someone charged \$50 for the lot' and then they'd actually tell us their name. Cassie is like the mother of all of us and she's always fixed them up, it was making it hard for us, those ones that would charge anything [so as] to get a hit.

**Althea:** A lot of girls deny it [dropping their prices] – 'I never, never, never drop my prices'. Bullshit! What about when you're hanging out and you've got to make \$40 more to get on [buy heroin] and you're starting to get sick. Some guy wants a \$40 oral and you say you won't do it.' 'No won't do it, won't do it for less than \$50.' You just know that they're bullshitting. I mean everyone does it to score. Lately a few girls have been dropping their prices period.

**Emily:** I was reading through something in a pamphlet [a service agency] were putting out. They're trying to promote women charging a certain amount for jobs in the street. They're trying to push the girls to set a limit. I was so angry, what business is it of an agency? I don't think they realise that you pretend that you're charging a certain amount but basically if you're hanging out and you need \$20 to get on to make up your \$100 you'll do what you've got to do. I don't think they realise that woman going around saying 'I won't go lower than \$50 or I won't go lower than \$80' is bullshit. An agency coming in puts extra pressure out there. The girls want to sort it out and punch each other's heads over it, that's their business. Waiting around for another 5 hours till you get \$50 isn't going to stop you hanging out.

**Tina:** See, I never go down [in price], I won't go down because I just won't, but there's nights where we've stood [for hours] and we've had to go down. Neela's had to go down because she's stood all night with two jobs and if that was me with two [jobs] I'd have to do the same as well and that's because of the girls

that are undercutting, the girls that are going private, the girls that are giving more time, you know, doing it without condoms, every client asks for it.

**Riley:** Over the long term, the trade has changed. The numbers of guys [working] are probably still about the same. There were probably a few more guys maybe two or three years ago. Probably in total there are about 20, 30 guys working. It's always been about that many. The real change is that there's stuff-all work down there at the moment. Ten years ago, you could go down and you'd be standing there for five minutes, hop in a car, do a job, hop out, stand on the street for five minutes, hop into another car. You'd be in and out. You'd be exhausted and call it quits and go home. But now you're standing out there all night and lucky to get one job. I have no idea why. Absolutely no idea at all. It's not just me, it's the same for everyone.

The street's absolutely crap. It's a waste of time, an absolute waste of time being down there. I usually charge 60 for oral ... or 50 ... the other night, I was willing to take 40, but I wouldn't go below that. This was at like 11.00 o'clock. Because it was just as we were leaving I thought oh well, \$40 is an extra \$40. But yeah, [*chuckling*] he wanted to pay 25.

Perhaps more worrying is the willingness of desperate workers to agree to unsafe sex practices with obvious implications for their own, their clients and public health. Although they 'play the game' with services and outreach workers – admitting to practising safe sex at all times – the reality is somewhat different.

**Emily:** When you're out there you say, 'I always use condoms' because you have to. It's the game you play; it's just what you do. You have to tell yourself that you're above board, that you wouldn't do this. [However], I do think it's pretty rare [to not use condoms] ... There was probably about 5 times in the whole time I worked that I didn't use a condom and it's one of those funny decisions where you'll be strict, strict, strict like for 100 people and then for just some reason you just kind of go, oh, I'm not arguing the point, I can't really be fucked.

**Mia:** I hear the girls are standing around four and five hours before they get anything. I know myself [that] if you're hanging out and a guy offers you 40 bucks, well you're gonna do it.

Most girls don't use condoms for oral ... but a lot won't admit it. The men just won't wear them. Gonorrhoea was rife on the street a while ago in everyone's mouth and that's why. You see that's the trouble with these clients. You get girls out there that think that clients only see them. They actually believe it. They [the clients] don't. They see every one of us. They would have fucked every one of us out there and they're always looking for new girls. If I work, a lot of the clients that have been around 10, 15 years, they don't pick me up because they know I'm an old worker. I've been out there a long time. They're looking for new, fresh girls, I suppose.

**Laura:** It's obvious that there's a lot of girls doing cheap, unprotected work because probably 8 out of every 10 guys want it. A lot of them want both oral and sex unprotected and they are guys that you see on a [regular] basis so if they're asking you [then] they've asked all the other girls. There are girls that do it obviously. So if you're going to do it with them how many other girls has he slept with unprotected? I'm not willing to take that risk over \$100. I mean some girls say, 'I do this and that for \$30 and \$20 but at least I'm home by midnight'. I thought, 'yeah, you go home and how many guys have you done unprotected work [with]?' You've had to see ten guys where I might be out here till a lot later but I've only seen half the amount of people and I go home knowing that I've done it all protected.

Girls say it's getting too tough now so you've just got to do it. If we all stuck to our standards, the guys wouldn't have any choice. They'd go with you. It's only because you say alright I'll do it. That's why they're getting it. They don't see that logic. They seem to think they are going to miss out on the work if they don't do unprotected. If everyone stuck to their guns then every girl would get their fair amount of work.

**Jem:** So many girls, pretty much because of their addiction, they'll just do the stupidest things for the money, for the hit. Like, \$50 to have sex with a guy without a condom – most of them will do it. If it got to 10.30, 11.00 at night and she only has half an hour to make 50 bucks or be sick all night. That's the huge problem in St Kilda. The unsafe sex acts down there. A lot of guys, you're gonna knock back because you see them going with certain girls. The women in the health van ... like I know them and they say to you all the time, 'She won't get checked'. You got a free service there, why aren't you getting it checked? Because ultimately you don't want to know something.

The desperation to meet the needs of a drug dependency can be such that all other concerns became secondary. As Jem noted:

At the end of the day, I believe heroin makes you do more things. Working with a habit is a scary thing. I've worked in St Kilda now for three years and pretty much two and a half of those years are everyday work, 24 hours a day nearly. I use to always be down there. I had a big habit ... I used like two, three grams a day ... my habit can go up to three, four grand a week and I used to work a lot to get that money. At the same time, when you're working so much, you get really run down. You're not eating right, you lose heaps of weight, you're not sleeping, but you don't know how to stop.

## PHYSICAL HEALTH

As Jem observes, health is very much secondary to meeting more immediate needs. Drug dependency compelled a number of those who partook in this project to work in the colder months of winter. Many workers, particularly those using large amounts of drugs, had reduced immunity to illness. Both Althea and Paxton were two of those who came down with particularly nasty cases of flu.

**Althea:** The last month has been hideous. I'm getting over flu. I've just been sick, sick as sick. You can't get over it, you've got a habit and you can't take days off. I was lucky because Peta worked a couple of nights and did well and covered my arse. I was just in bed I couldn't get up. Get up and I'd be like, dizzy and fall over. [I took] a couple of days [off], a couple of nights and when you've got a habit you can't afford to do that because you are chasing your tail pretty much all the time. Then I had to go back to work because Peta was exhausted and I didn't want her to get sick as well because if we're both down, we're both fucked. I felt that after having a couple of days and nights just in bed, I'd feel a little better and go out to work. But because it was so cold I'd just get sick again. Started off head cold, and then went to my chest and then I had aching all over. I've never had flu as bad as that ever. It was as bad as hanging out [for heroin] without any pills.

**Paxton:** I'm not working tonight. I've got the flu. I've been sick about 3 weeks. This week is probably the worst. As soon as you stop [working] you crash a bit.

## MENTAL HEALTH

Engaging in street-based sex work can have serious consequences for an individual's self esteem. For some, it is simply the fact that they are taking part in an activity that fills them with self-loathing. The use of heroin or other drugs to cope can be a strategy that places themselves, and their clients, at risk.

Denise: If you take enough smack, you go on the nod, you think you're invincible anyway ... nothing can hurt you ... it doesn't matter what someone throws at you, you're a lot stronger, you can just knock anyone down, use a finger.

I mean, I've done that before ... fallen asleep on them [during sex]. But I don't use pills ... most of them [the workers] use pills and other sorts of drugs as well, so besides not seeing straight, their brains' not working anyway.

For some, the constant 'gawking' of passing motorists and the often explicit moral judgements that accompany their stares, can have an impact upon self-esteem.

**Tina:** You definitely lose your self-esteem feeling like, fuck, what am I doing down here? It makes it even worse. For starters you don't want to be down there. I've always been conscious of it so I do my thing and then I'm out of there, but when you're standing there ... I refuse to give them the pleasure of standing there while they go around and around.

**Riley:** I hate standing around for so long. I wouldn't mind if I just walked down there and had a job straight away, I wouldn't mind so much. I just hate standing around forever and that feeling of being on parade. I don't like it.

Laura had been away from the streets for some time following the vicious rape she was suffered. However, perhaps as a response to the ongoing trauma of her ordeal and the continuing lack of resolution in the courts, she continued to use heroin on a regular basis. Escalating drug use and an unhappy housing situation left her in a position at which a return to 'the street' had become unavoidable.

**Laura:** I'm finding it really, really difficult at the moment ... working. I've found myself going back down the same path, going out nearly every day again. The using [heroin], it's gotten to every day. I found myself down that path which I was trying so hard to get away from. There was just a couple of nights when I was out there and I was getting to the stage where I was that depressed from standing there ... usually you can hold yourself together but I just felt like I was going to just break down. It's a weird feeling.

It's really gotten to me. This was the last thing I wanted to go back to. It's already been a month now, if I keep going by the end of the year I'll be back to where I was ...drained, really unhealthy and extremely unhappy. All you do is work, go home for a tiny bit and then straight back out to work again. I don't want that. Usually I can hold my composure but I really felt like I just wanted to ... Like I was just sitting there and in the back of my head I was going ... I just want to go home, I just want to go home ... but I knew I couldn't. You get some work and you keep thinking, 'hopefully I get out of this car and I get one really quickly and then I can just get home'. I'm actually craving to get home. It's been driving me mad.

Mia perhaps summed it up best, relating her reaction to the movie *Monster* and placing it in the context of the clients who abuse and degrade her.

I saw a really good video the other night, *Monster* about [executed female serial killer] Eileen Wuornos. She got the death penalty. Oh shit mate did that hit home. Have you seen it? It hit home, like she was raped really bad and she tries to go straight and nobody [gives her a chance]. She was hitch-hiking [and sex working]. She was just like hitch-hiking and she'd put across some bullshit story about her kids or something and then the money thing would happen. What topped it off [was that] she was raped really bad and then she just looked at every one [man] as a rapist and a molester and killed them in cold blood. I didn't even know it was a true story until the end of it.

It was, fuck, just like what a lot of us girls have been through. Fuck it hit home, it really did. How's this? I watched it Saturday night and then, [*laughing*] oh, fuck, then Sunday I went and seen this private client. He runs his own business, he's got two kids and a nice home. He's divorced. He lives on his own. I've been doing him for 10 years or more. [*Fits of laughter*] I went and seen him, he always wants a head job, right, but when you're like sucking him off he hits you on the back – he doesn't hit you hard – and he goes, 'you fucking whore, you're a fucking mole, you're a fucking whore'. And all I could think about was that movie. I just felt like biting it off. That's how she was treated in the movie.

I could relate to her killing them and everything because I go and see that client Sunday and I'm doing him and he's calling me a whore and a slut and you're just degraded. I mean yeah it's for money, you've got to turn off but the timing of that was bizarre (*Mia*).

# 12

I LOST TRUST IN GUYS,  
BUT NOT ALL GUYS

A HISTORY OF A STREET-BASED SEX WORK IN ST KILDA  
I LOST TRUST IN GUYS, BUT NOT ALL GUYS





## I LOST TRUST IN GUYS, BUT NOT ALL GUYS

Mia alludes to the power dynamics of illicit street-based sex work. Men perpetrate the vast majority of assaults inflicted on workers – male, female and transgender alike. For several women, this has had a lasting impact upon the way in which they see men. Others, such as Laura, continued to seek out male company despite enduring a number of violent relationships with ‘boyfriends’. Her male friends are almost all former clients. Similarly, over the six months we met, Lisa was enjoying a relationship with a man she had met during the course of her work.

**Lisa:** I met Greg, the guy I’m seeing now ... I came back down here a couple of months after I got out of jail. I started working down here and decided to stay out of relationships for a while. There was too much shit. I was always getting trouble, attracting the wrong crowd, no-hoper kind of guys that just wanted me for my money, drugs or whatever. And then working one night I met the guy I’m seeing now. It just started off as a job but he started ringing me every single night. We ended up taking it further. I stopped working and decided to get off the drugs and still seeing him. He’s 32. I’m 25. These days that’s nothing.

*[Did the incidents of violence on the street and with past boyfriends make it difficult to trust guys again?]* To an extent, but basically any guy or any girl can do that ... I lost trust with guys, but it’s not *all* guys, so why should all males get the heading of arseholes when it’s not all guys that do that. I put it down to a bad experience and something that I couldn’t get myself out of at the time but I don’t dwell on it, ‘Oh, poor me, why did that happen to me?’ It happened. I’ve dealt with it and moved on.

*[Was it difficult for you to maintain a relationship and be working at the same time?]* Well, he met me down here so he understood my circumstances. Over a few months it got to the point where he wanted to take things more seriously and it was up to me whether or not I wanted to. If I did, then he wanted me to start slowing down the work which was fair enough... and I did.

The issue of maintaining a relationship while working was a contentious one and those participating in this project had a number of differing views. Although it is impossible to make generalisations based solely on the small number of participants, it is interesting to note that the younger women had no apparent issue with forming a relationship with clients. In contrast, more experienced workers were inclined to argue that such a relationship was unsustainable in light of the circumstances. Jem explained her perspective in the following terms:

**Jem:** When you've worked all night, the last thing you want is to be social. I never bring clients back to my home ever ... I've taken them to someone's house that I've lived but if it was my property with my name on it, no, I wouldn't be bringing men back because it can really go against you. You give them your phone number, the first time they ring up, they're asking you out, 'Do you want to go out to see a movie?' 'Mate, how did we meet?' That's what I generally say, 'How did we meet?' They'll be, 'Yeah, but it doesn't matter'. It does matter. Like come on. Then when we meet your friends and family, you want me to lie about how we met, 'How did you meet?' 'At the Casino'. 'How did you really meet?' 'Oh, I was on the streets of St Kilda working as a prostitute and he picked me up and paid me \$100 for sex'.

It's really funny. I can meet a guy and really like him, I'm saying through work, St Kilda work, and I think, 'Mate, this is a grouse guy, fuck, why hasn't he got a missus?' And he can be gorgeous or whatever. But if he turned around and said, 'Can we go out for dinner?' the answer would be, 'No ... look how we met'. When you've had sex straight off with someone, a sad thing is that a lot of times you'll be driving back after it and they'll be talking to you and then they'll say, 'What was your name again?' I must admit, 90 per cent of the time I don't want to know their names, but it's, like, you know, you can't even remember a name. It's not a good start.

Some girls I call lifestylers and others it's a choice. A lifestyler is a girl [for whom] it's a life. They can't build another life other than a pathetic life of prostitution. They interact with the clients and bring them into their personal lives ... you shouldn't do that, it's dangerous. But they choose to do that ... it's a lifestyle. For me, when I go down there, it's work. I don't want to interact with them and I get really pissed off when they try and come into my life. It's like, 'I'm only doing this as a form of money.' Then again you do meet nice guys. To say that the men down there are scumbags, they're not. Some are, but some aren't, you know. [But] pay me, I'll do it and go home.

Simone left sex work after meeting a man (outside of street work). As she said: 'I stopped as soon as I met him. There's no way known I could have worked and been with a man ... no'. Similarly, Riley would draw back from street work once he settled into a relationship. His partner also has a history as a male street-based sex worker.

Tina found she was unable to consider entering a relationship while working in the sex industry. She admitted that the nature of the work 'stuffs up' a lot of relationships. Her working life, at least in the sex industry, had left her with a jaded view of the very notion of 'love'.

**Tina:** I must admit I have chosen work over [love] because of survival. Not only survival but also getting the things you want in life. Doing shows – you know every costume, in constant need of make up, in constant need of hair extensions. So a lot of relationships I veer away from. You know, it stuffs your head if you are with someone and you're [sex] working as well. Unless you can work something out. Too many past relationships have been really hard because of juggling the two.

Love is used too freely [as a word]. Being in the [sex] industry, I see it all. I see guys that are just about to get married and they're in the room with us [having sex].

That's the price that we pay when we are doing the work. We can't be in love or in a great relationship that we would like to be in because of the work we're doing. It gets to a point where you have to choose between the two and I know it seems terrible choosing money over love but sometimes if you need the things that you've got to get, like my house, you've got to. No one else is going to get it for you. I've always paid my way, I've always had a roof over my head and a normal job is not going to get me all of this. I mean it can but I'm just not used to that lifestyle of being in a normal job ... and I don't feel a man has been worthy enough for me to change.

Of course [I'd like a relationship], definitely. I mean I've numbers galore that I could call but I don't. You get very selfish in this industry ... I only want to see a man twice a week anyway if I'm in a relationship, twice a week is plenty for me because I like to have my own space and do my own thing. Then you've got to juggle [stage] shows, coming home late and all of that so it takes a lot of person to put up with all of that. That's why, to me, love is just a four letter word. Because you're in the sex industry, you're with men [and] it's the last thing you want when you get home. It stuffs up a lot of your relationships because you don't really want to be touched.

# 13

I'VE LOOKED AT  
MARINE  
BIOLOGY

STREETWALKING BLUES  
- SEX WORK, ST KILDA AND THE STREET

I'VE LOOKED AT MARINE BIOLOGY



## I'VE LOOKED AT MARINE BIOLOGY

Previous chapters draw attention to engagement in illicit sex work (and the consequences of such engagement) as experienced by the project participants. Although central to the lives of each participant, it is important to recognise that 'work' is just one part of their lives. In our status conscious world, *all* of us tend to have our 'social standing' evaluated, to a degree, by how we make an income. However, perhaps nobody is so defined or 'branded' by their means of earning money as sex workers. The stigma associated with street-based sex work is such that other aspects of a sex worker's life fade to the background. As the known injecting drug user is so often defined solely by this one activity, so the street-based sex worker assumes the caricature of the 'street-corner hooker', devoid of the relationships, the experiences and the personal stories that make all of us unique individuals.

Tina has worked in the sex industry for a considerable time – on the streets, in legitimate brothels and as a 'travelling worker':

**Tina:** I used to travel and work from hotels. I'd put private ads in all the papers. Like I'd do the Gold Coast then Brisbane, then come back [to Melbourne] and have 2 weeks off and go away for three weeks. In every city I would pick a hotel that was busy so that it doesn't look like you're working, do you know what I mean? It's easier that way because you just answer your phone and you only have to do like 6 [clients] so it's easier ... and they're a definite \$150. That's how you sort of get stuck in that process, well, this works, you know. Go away, come back, go away and come back. I've been doing that for 5 years.

However, at all times, Tina's involvement in sex work has been secondary to, and in order to support, other aspects of her life. These do not include drug use. Tina doesn't shy away from a history of recreational drug use. However, her drug use has never been the motivation for her involvement in sex work. The primary reason for this involvement has been to support an expensive lifestyle that, when we first met, included show horses and a continued commitment to performing as a showgirl.

When performing, someone looks immaculate from head to toe but they work hard at that every day. You need to keep fit. As soon as you put on weight, no matter what anyone says in the show, as soon as you've put on weight you're upset ... you've got to keep it down.

It is very exotic, it's an art. You need to have a passion to be on stage. Not a lot of people know about the background work of it when you are backstage. Mentally the girls are so professional. They're sitting back there, they've got five different changes [of clothes]. It's like a mini theatre production but you don't have the dressers, you're doing it yourself. You might have one dresser at the back. You're zipping yourself into outfits or you've got to think of dropping one outfit and have another one underneath that fits and then you've got another one underneath as well.

Tina was also planning for her future and in order to attain the degree of financial security she perceived as being necessary, she was making difficult, but important, decisions about her lifestyle.

I'm downsizing. [I have] two places. Paying \$700 in the city and \$290 in Seddon, that's a bit much. Seddon was my home, where I went to get away. I don't have [sex] working where I live.

Three months later, Tina *had* succeeded in 'downsizing'. She was living in a comfortable apartment in inner-SE Melbourne and had sold her show horses.

I've downsized everything, it's taken me a year but I've downsized. Seddon's gone, the horses are gone and expenses are going down. I had a lot of lay-bys and money owing in different areas that came to \$2,500 to \$3,000, that's come right down. You've got to deal with the process of moving forward which I have.

[Now], to be able to survive on a \$600 wage is great. I've always known the value of money but not appreciated it enough because [sex working] you're making so much that you're constantly spending ... whether it be shows, whether it be home stuff, whether it be horses. Horses kept me grounded, you know two show horses, it costs. It's one of the most expensive sports. I've ridden horses since I was little. A lot of the girls have actually. A lot of the transsexuals that I've worked with have past histories of horse competing.

The need for less money allowed Tina to scale back the amount of sex work she was engaging in. She had enrolled in a computer course and intended to spend her extra time learning skills that would assist her in attaining employment.

Being young in the scene, [sex] working, getting a thousand dollars night after night, it's hard to pass up, but at the same time it gets to a point where, you're 40, you've got to start making decisions, changing the lifestyle. Not settling down but changing the lifestyle, thinking of the future. You can't be sexy forever. It's fun when you're spending money ridiculously but I haven't done that for the last three years.

Mentally you've got to move on. The show is all lovely and beautiful of a night but through the day you've got to find a career, as in a 9 to 5 job that's going to support you. And because I'm 30 now, I've got to get into that. I'm not afraid of it in any way. I just don't want to be thrown into an office job and not feel secure with computer skills and all of that ... I'm not a computer person. So I want to have that. I'm a person that has to go out and get the experience before doing it but I've been neglecting myself, staying in the comfort zones of [doing] shows. You do your shows, you do your escorting of a night where you just have to look beautiful at dinners and stuff like that ... but that becomes demanding because once again you put on a show. You have to go into talking mode with the client and it gets demanding. I think 30s for me is panic time. You've got to get everything happening further.

I want to get the skills behind me. I don't have them. I left school when I was in grade 10 and just went, bang, straight into dancing and I didn't further any of my other skills. I just wanted to be a dancer.

The computer course has just started ... that's not happening fast enough for me but I've been busy with getting bills up to date and all that and getting in here [the new house]. You know, you need \$5,000 to move anywhere these days and by the time you get removalist trucks, bond, things like that, it all adds up ... so that can be draining. By the start of next year I should be getting into something more out there in the real world.

Riley was HIV positive, the consequence of a relationship with an unfaithful partner. Riley remains on a strict regime of medication and takes active steps to safeguard his health. Although he didn't dwell on his health problems in conversations with me, it is obviously an issue around which much of life revolves.

**Riley:** I'm on the Disability [Support] Pension because I've got HIV. Sex-related. I got it from my ex-partner. It was diagnosed in 1998. It was in the middle of our relationship. In the beginning, we both had tests before we had unsafe sex. We had three tests in total and both of us were clear, so after six months we started having unsafe sex. I was one hundred per cent monogamous. As far as I knew he was one hundred per cent monogamous as well ... but he wasn't. I actually said to him, 'Look, have you slept with anyone else, and if you had, I don't care ... please just tell and we'll wear condoms'. He said, 'I swear on our love, I haven't'. He lied. He had found out he was positive about three weeks prior to that and he gave it to me.

He rang me up one day and said, 'Oh, I've got HIV. You better go and get tested because you might have it too', and I said, 'What do you mean I might have it? 'How did you catch it?', and he said, 'There was one of two people who I might have got it off. I don't know which one it was'. I said, 'I asked you if you ever had unsafe sex, and you said no'. He said, 'Yeah, well I lied'.

I had a test for everything. I wasn't actually expecting the results ... I wasn't expecting HIV positive. The doctor sat me down and said, 'Riley, I have to tell you something important. Sorry to inform you, but you're HIV positive'. I started bawling my eyes out and I opened the door and said, 'Come in here'. I said, 'I'm positive'. He said, 'Oh, I'm sorry ... blah, blah, blah'. Then we went home, and he said, 'Do you want anything from the shops? I'm going to get some cigarettes' and he disappeared for two weeks. [*Laughter*] Isn't that nice?

I had my cousin with me, so it was alright. And a few friends. I didn't see a counsellor. I don't really need a counsellor. It's just something you cope with yourself ... you eventually get over it, or learn to live with it, because you have to ... there's nothing you can do about it.

Now I'm good at being angry with people face to face. I've grown to be like that because of people like him. Back then I would never have stood up for myself, but now I'll stand up for myself in any situation. I'll never let anyone get anything over me ... no way. No one has the right to, so I won't even let them try.

My mother is very supportive. Whenever I speak to her, she always asks how my health is, what my T-cell is and all that sort of stuff. I maintain my health as well as possible. I make myself dinner every night. What did we have last night? T-Bone steak with five veg and dessert. And we had lunch and we always have breakfast, so we have three meals a day. In that way I look after myself.

I go to the Melbourne Sexual Health Clinic ... I get a check up once every six months and I get six months worth of medication. Before that, it was probably once a month, once every two months, but now, because I take my medication every day, I get six months supply. I haven't missed a dose in two and a half years, which is a record at the Sexual Health Clinic. I just go there a couple of weeks beforehand, get my blood done and then go for my appointment [when the results are known]. The doctor sees that everything's fine and gives me six months of medication ... and I go back after another six months.

When I first started taking medication, I became jaundiced and anaemic. I rang up my doctor and said, 'Something's wrong here because I'm yellow ... and I only weigh 35 kilos'. He said, 'Stop taking those tablets now!' I went and saw him that day and he said, 'If you had been taking those tablets for another week, you would have died'. I was allergic to AZT. I didn't realise and he didn't realise either.

After those tablets, he put me on another regime and it would give me these horrific migraines. I couldn't sleep all night, they were horrible. I'd just be crying and the pain was just intense. That went on for about three months. I thought they would go away. I rang him again and he said, 'After two weeks of that, you should have stopped taking them'. I didn't know that, he didn't tell me. And so I went back in and what I'm on now, I've been on for four years, and they've been great.

Riley's public housing was organised by AHAG (AIDS Housing Action Group), a community based, non-profit organisation offering a statewide housing service for people living with HIV/AIDS. The John R Stroop Housing Association (JRS) is landlord / manager of a number of properties. AHAG also provides an In-Home Support Service for JRS tenants.

I waited four months for housing. In the time I waiting, I was in a transitional housing flat in Elwood anyway. The housing was organised by AHAG. I was assessed as 'Priority one' because of recurring homelessness. I was living in rooming houses or share accommodation. Basically recurring homelessness means you're transient – you don't stay at an address for more than 3 months.

Because I've got a Department of Housing flat, my rent gets taken out of my payment ... it's 25 per cent of my payment. I get about \$260 a fortnight. I've lived in [SE suburbs] for eighteen months. It's definitely good quality accommodation.



Other's lives revolved around mental ill-health and the complicated lives that had resulted from their search for security. For Laura had always been about the need to pay for her drug dependency. However, her use of drugs was, in all likelihood, a 'self-medicating' response to a life lived under miserable conditions. Laura's life was defined by hardship and sex work was just one of several characteristics contributing to this hardship.

**Laura:** I've had a trail of very violent relationships ... which didn't turn me off men, it just turned me off relationships. I don't know [why I hook up with the violent types]. Because you're using [heroin] ... you tend to get low self-esteem anyway ... you don't think that you deserve any better. I don't know ... that's the way I look at it.

I had three really violent relationships – physically and verbally violent – in a row.

The inside and outside of Laura's forearms are covered with scars.

Oh, *that* one, that's from a boyfriend throwing me through a glass door. Ex boyfriend, ex, ex, horrible ex. I've got scars all over me unfortunately, mainly from ex boyfriends. I've picked a few crazy ones in my life that just sit there and cut you for their pleasure. But I really want to get rid of these [track marks]. Like I saw a girl the other day and I just couldn't believe it. She went to have a hit and she had to take off all her clothes ...

The self-esteem thing is a big problem. It's got a lot to do with my childhood, my raising. It's not just all of a sudden that I started using the heavy drugs ... it stems right back. I had no time to grieve. It was like saying, 'you've got to do this, move here, do this'. I had no chance to stop and go, 'Woah, what's happened?' So it was pretty heavy. As I said I had to go from nine to 16 overnight and I missed out on all those years because I had to grow up and really look after myself.

To tell you the truth, no, [I don't have any supportive friends]. I mean, being a user, I don't mix with other users. I don't go and hang out with other users. I stick to myself a lot. I spend a lot of time on my own. My family, we're not close. My brothers and sisters, we don't talk.

At the moment I'm at a point where I feel ... I find lately that when I get down, I get extremely down. I'm very good at putting on a face and I stay very silent ... I don't talk much. I'll go home and [even] if my world is coming to an end, I wouldn't sit down and talk to my housemate about it. I'll just smile and go, 'How are you going? I'm going to my room'. I do a lot of writing as a release. I write about everything, how I'm feeling, how my day's been, what's going on in my life, where I'd like to be, people that are around me. It's like sometimes I can see people walking all over me and I keep letting them do it. I think, 'Why am I letting them do it?' I've got to stand up and be stronger. I'm not saying I'm an angel. I've done my fair share of wrongdoing as well, but the last months have been very tough in the sense of feeling trapped.

I've had a bad two weeks and I get to the point where ... I feel bad saying it in front of you, I've just met you, but sometimes I really think that ... it's a horrible way to think, but I could easily just do myself in right here and now. If there was an easy way to do it, I'd do it, you know. I don't like thinking those things ...

From our first meeting to our last – a period of more than six months, Laura's was involved with two older men who manipulated and exploited her. They had dealt her self-esteem several blows and she was increasingly subjected to interrogations about what she was doing with her time and with whom.

I'm in private rental. I share with one other guy [Ray]. He's 50 years old and I've known him for about 10 years. I was working in the Prince of Wales. He reckons he knows me from behind the bar. His words were, 'I wouldn't mind having a piece of that' so to speak, and then a couple of months later, that's when I started working on the streets and he spotted me and grabbed me. Then went on like that for a while where it was just a working thing, but then we became friends. There's nothing sexual now; we live together as friends.

Ray never used to pay any attention to what I did as long as, if I was staying out late, I'd send him a message saying 'I'm safe, it's OK'. That's all he wanted, he would never pry into what I was doing. Now, since we moved to this place, a really nice flat in Elwood ... things have become worse. He's become very possessive and wants to know what I'm doing all the time. I feel trapped. I don't like to ever think bad thoughts but you know, you often lie there and think, 'I really don't want tomorrow to come.' It was meant to be for the best, this living arrangement, but now I'm gonna have to find someone to take my place to move in and then that means I'll have to find the funds to get my own place.

I had a friend over the other night, completely innocent, all we did was sit in my room. He didn't leave until 5 in the morning but who cares what time he left? Anyway, Ray runs up to Justin and says, 'oh, Jeff was here last night, he got here at nine and didn't leave until 5 in the morning'. I got the third degree. I said, 'We were just talking. People do just talk.' I get it all the time. I wish I didn't move in there now. Justin and him both ganged up on me and I'm not an arguing type of person. I just sit there and let them say their piece and once they're finished, I'll say, 'OK, I've taken in what you've said, but I can't see that I've done anything wrong. I'm being made to feel guilty for something [but] I don't know what'.

I went for a walk today. I went and saw a friend and relaxed for a while. I'd switched my phones off until 3 o'clock and as soon as I turned them on I got a phone call from Justin abusing me. I say to Justin, 'do you expect me to sit at home, hands clasped and legs crossed waiting for you to show up' ... because he never rings, just shows up. He goes, 'No, go out, lead your life', but every time he's come over and I haven't been there I've copped an abusive message like 'where the fuck are you? Get home now'. You think, hang on ...

Oh, very [possessive]. 'You're not allowed to talk to this person, you're not allowed to talk to that person'. If my phone rings, it's like the world's coming to an end ... The way I'm living at the moment, or we're all living, the three of us, is absolutely miserable. I shouldn't have to explain when I'm going out.

It was very apparent during our meetings that Laura was desperate for friendship and support. She has no friends, at least none she feels she can trust and her family – her brothers and sisters – give her very little, if any support.

To tell you the truth, no, [I don't have any supportive friends]. I mean, being a user, I don't mix with other users, I don't go and hang out with other users. I stick to myself. I spend a lot of time on my own. My family, we're not close. My brothers and sisters, we don't talk. I've only just caught up with my oldest brother in the last couple of months. He owns the [furniture shop] on \_\_\_\_\_ Street. Yeah and he got me to start making some lamps for him, so I started doing that, but it hasn't exactly brought a bond [between us]. I know it might take a while ... at least I'm actually speaking to him. It was eight years that we didn't speak and we only ever lived five minutes around the corner [from each other].

I got pretty disheartened [about Christmas] last year. I was at my sister house and she rang all the family, her and the kids were going away for Christmas. I was on the phone to [my brother] Adam and he said, 'why don't we get together Christmas Day. I'm going out with [fiancé]. We'll meet at Automatic on South Bank'. I hadn't seen my brother Adam for a long time, so I said alright. I showed up at Automatic and I had presents for them and I'm sitting in Automatic. Adam said, 'I'll be there at 5 o'clock and I'll leave my phone on in case you can't find the place'. So I'm sitting there with these presents, six o'clock comes and his phone is switched off, 8 o'clock comes and I'm just all teary eyed. I end up going and sitting in South Bank and getting drunk for the night.

Thankfully, by in mid-December, Laura's crimes compensation case had been heard. After numerous frustrations and a lack of priority being attached to her case, she had been placed in contact with a lawyer who had succeeded in expediting the case and ensuring a positive outcome. Problems continued with the 'men' in Laura's life. However, she no longer needed to engage in street-based sex work, given that she had the financial security necessary to allow her to begin seeking alternative accommodation. She also had support to pursue her dream of completing studies in marine biology.

It went a lot better than what I thought. I had a really sympathetic magistrate. Under the section [of the Crimes Compensation Act] I was going for it was between 3,500 and 7,500 [of potential compensation]. The magistrate said, 'I'm prepared to give her the whole 7,500 because of the severity of the crime.' He said, 'I think she deserves more but because of the law we can only give her that much'. He gave me that plus he paid all my medical fees, like \$600 on the night that it happened. All that was paid for and there were a few other things paid for,

10 doctors appointments worth \$40 each, another psychiatrist that I saw ... and he kept saying are there any other costs? If you come up with any more just bring them back to court and I'll cover them.

He also asked me what I wanted to do with my life and I told him about schooling and he said, 'well outside the money that I'm granting you I'm here for another three years so if you can prove to me that you do really want to go to school and you are sticking at it I'm prepared to cover your school costs'. I said I'm going to get a job and he goes, 'yeah but it's going to be a bit tough for you to do it all in such a short amount of time so I could give you a lot of relief by covering your school costs'. I've looked on the Internet [for information] about courses. I've looked at marine biology

I haven't been doing [street work] really. There's been the odd occasion where someone's rung me up but very rarely. I've only done it for a little bit of pocket money but I haven't gone out on the street. Plus I've been using [heroin]. I'm not blaming anyone because it's my own fault but I said to Ray yesterday, 'I'm extremely unhappy here and I often turn to drugs because of my unhappiness. If I was in a place of my own and felt happy and motivated I would probably not turn to the drugs.' I've got this window of opportunity that this magistrate opened for me, if I didn't take it up I would be an idiot. But the only way I am going to get forward is if I do move out on my own.

As Laura's life began to come together and she had the resources to begin to establish herself independently, the manipulation of her older housemate, Ray, and her 'friend' Justin, was becoming more apparent.

I'm tired of the way Justin speaks to me. I go out and come home and he calls me a slut and this and that. I said, 'it's so ironic that for so long you stood by me and when I am actually getting my shit together that's when you're at your most nastiest, that's when you are the least supportive'. Neither of them are supportive in the sense of, 'great, you want to get a place and go to school'. I'm not getting that encouragement.

One day he's happy and the next day it's, 'I'm fucking off and never seeing you again'. He got quite a shock last week. He said 'I'm leaving, goodbye'. I said, 'okay goodbye'. I think that shocked him. He realised, 'shit, she really has had enough'.

In an earlier episode that she related, Justin had provided her with money to buy heroin when she was attempting to dry out.

I found it quite bizarre. Justin knew I was sick and he came in and goes 'you're pretty crook aren't you?' And he put down \$100 on my bed and said 'I hate seeing you go through this'. I go, 'no, no, no'. He goes, 'no, just make yourself alright'. Anyway, of course I did and later that night he came back past and put a letter in the letterbox. It was saying all this stuff like - 'I don't think you can do this on your

own. I've been trying very hard to help you but I'm getting very drained' and all this stuff. I found it quite strange. Like, I was doing it [drying out] today, I wasn't whinging or complaining, and you came in and put \$100 down.

Justin is one of a number of older men who prey on vulnerable young women who work the streets of St Kilda. Perhaps the term 'sex slave' isn't too great a stretch in these circumstances. Young women with no personal supportive relationships find themselves 'looked after' by men with false promises and a sole desire to have a young woman under their control.

Justin made a comment, 'it's been awhile'. I said, 'what? You mean you haven't had sex?' He goes, 'if you want to put it that way.' I said, 'so you coming around and me not putting out is getting you shitty?' It's making me feel compelled to have sex with him to keep the peace.

Hopefully, the chances offered by her Crimes Compensation settlement would allow her the space to build a life in which the negative and manipulative forces of the past could be replaced by a new-found independence and a positive mindset.

I can get down off my high horse and say I have stuffed up, I have made plenty of mistakes but we all have. And people change. I don't think I'm that far gone. I've got the right ideas, I've just got to put them into action but only if I'm on my own. Every time I've been on my own I've been very motivated. I know what has to be done and I do it.

Regardless of how most occupied their time when not on the streets – it is important to reiterate the fact that none of these individuals were or are solely defined by the hours – whether long or short – they spend on the streets. Unlike a small number of participants such as Laura and Mia, most of the contributors to the project continue to enjoy good relationships with their families. To certain people, these 'sex workers' are sons and daughters, sisters and brothers and mothers and fathers.

**Althea:** Yeah [we're very close], I saw my brothers and my Dad today and spoke to Mum. Just about every day I speak to someone [in the family] if not see them. I had lunch with the folks [on my birthday]. Had lunch with the family. Went down to the [restaurant]. It's in St Kilda, just on the edge of the park. My sister-in-law, and her sister took over the lease and they've turned it into a café. It was a nice day so we all went there.

**Lisa:** Dad lives with my Nan in Ringwood. I've recently got a new unit in Ringwood, which is just around the corner from them. So I see him weekly. Yeah, [I pretty much stayed in touch with] my Nan and my dad. When I went to prison Dad was coming to visit me and he opened up about his jail life.

**Simon:** My sister has only recently just found out that I have a drug problem. She hasn't found out [about sex work] ... unless mum told her on the sly. But my dad and my aunty and grandmother and my stepmother all found out. 'Cause when I went back at Christmas time, I tried to do a cold turkey [from heroin]. I took diazepam everyday. I lasted about three days. The kids left on the fourth day and after that I collapsed in a heap 'cause I was hanging out so badly. I had to get hospitalised and in my morphine delirium, I decided, 'I need to tell you everything'. My dad hugged me and said something profound, you know, 'regardless of what or where I am, I'm his son always' and then walked off, couldn't deal.

For older participants, like Simone, their family life was centred on their children. When we first met in June, Simone was already looking forward to her eldest daughter's wedding.

**Simone:** [My daughters] live in the western suburbs and they come to see me every now and then. You know, they've got their own life. My eldest daughter, she's getting married, so she's got a lot to do to prepare for her wedding. My youngest daughter comes to see me when she can. [They're] 19 and 26 years old.

By September, there were only 3 weeks remaining before the wedding.

Next Saturday is the Hens night. There are six strippers. I'm going to let my daughter have one and I'll have five. We're going to meet down at *Young & Jacksons*. Then it's going to be on one of those cruise ships on the Yarra. It's \$75 and that's for the strippers, finger food and drinks. That's also entry for a nightclub and after that you bring extra money if you want to continue. I'll be partying all night. There's going to be topless waiters. It's going to be a good night. For me it will. I'm bad aren't I? You only enjoy life once.

By late October, the wedding had been held and was considered a great success.

Both my ex-husbands were there. I walked down with her Dad because, you know, we are the Mum and Dad but we got on good. She's going to be 26 in December. And my youngest daughter's Dad, Michael, the one that brought Tina up since she was 2 years old, he walked her down the aisle. She had both Dads there walking her down the aisle. It turned out really, really good. It was a European wedding, they spent a lot of money but that's how the Europeans do it. It was a beautiful wedding.

Janine's daughter has lived with Janine's parents for a long time. This has provided a secure environment but it has not led to the separation of the two, as Janine's parents continue to support their own daughter.

**Janine:** [When I went to jail] that's when my daughter went to live with my parents, first dad and my stepmum, they took her on, but then I had another you know, 'lapse', and then she lived with my stepfather and my mum. That's perfect, just around the corner, like they just live down the street. She goes to [school] in Carnegie. She's 14, old enough to ride down on the push bike.

{She's} in year 8, she's doing her maths exams at the moment, struggling through. It's starting to get harder but there's no worries. She's got no interest in boys and she's got no interest in tight pants, you know hipsters or anything. She's a super dog. Which is good. Can you imagine? My parents wouldn't have been able to put up with two of me, no way. It wouldn't have been fair.

[She doesn't stay at my house]. No, [my parents are] a bit funny about that. They wouldn't have her sleeping on the couch or this or that. And because I smoke she wouldn't want to be in a smoky atmosphere. I wouldn't smoke while she was there but, like, they [my parents] smell smoke as soon as they walk into the flat. They're very strict.

I saw [my daughter] last week, playing in the park with my little nieces and nephew. [The family's] getting together again, we're going to Beaumaris Hotel on Sunday for lunch for Father's Day so that'll be different. What can you say about family days, like, oh well you have to do this.

I SHOULD BE WITH  
MY FAMILY...  
REALITY STRUCK  
ME BASICALLY

STREETWALKING BLUES  
- SEX WORK, ST KILDA AND THE STREET

I SHOULD BE WITH MY FAMILY... REALITY STRUCK ME BASICALLY





## I SHOULD BE WITH MY FAMILY... REALITY STRUCK ME BASICALLY

Of those individuals who took part in this project, three had achieved their goal of leaving the 'trade behind' and one of these young women continued to see occasional 'private' clients. Several others, however, were striving to leave 'the street' behind, some desperately so. Perhaps only one or two were content to continue living a life in which sex work played a role.

### THE REALISATION

Lisa sought to leave the streets behind after her abduction and sexual assault at the hands of a client. This occurred around the same time as the violent death of Kelly Hodge after she was picked up while working in Grey Street.

**Lisa:** Basically the [incident with] the last guy knocked some sense into me. Sandy took me to the Flinders Street Police Station and I had to speak to the rape cops. That's what shook me up a bit ... and Kelly's murder around the same time. It was in a two week span and the thought came into my head that, you know, it could be me next ... the next car I get into might be the car that I don't get out of.

That ... and just getting sick of the street and winter. I didn't want to spend time down here on Christmas Day, trying to get money when I should be with my family ... reality struck me basically. I just didn't want to live like this any more.

Emily's desire to leave behind her life as a street-based worker was based less on the fact that her next client might harm her, if not end her life, and more on the basis of her own realisation that she was destroying her life.

**Emily:** I was on the street working. I was on amphetamines and was off my head. I was fried ... I always liked smack, but amphetamines just scatter me ... and my front tooth fell out, and I looked in the mirror and thought, 'Great, you're toothless at 34 ...' It was just a real [wake up]... I couldn't deny it. I'm looking in the mirror and I've got no bloody tooth. The women on the streets, a lot of them have really bad teeth, and it was just like, 'I can't do this any more'.

Simone's relatively brief time walking St Kilda's street sex circuit ended with the beginning of a relationship.

**Simone:** I met a man, not through work. I took a day off work one day [and I was] down in Carlton [and] our eyes crossed and the rest was history. He knew that I worked. I stopped as soon as I met him. There's no way known I could have worked and been with a man ... no. And he's a pure gentleman. I'm not about to turf that away.

Like Simone, Riley had left the street due to a stable relationship. However, leaving the street does not necessarily mean leaving sex work entirely. Riley's long period as a sex worker meant that he continued to see occasional regulars. One regular in particular provides a graphic insight into the suppressed sexuality and obvious psychological issues that sex workers inadvertently tend to.

**Riley:** Now I'm in a relationship I don't work as much as I did. Three months ago I was on the street every night. I have a few regulars who call me up, I might do a third of them. Cutting back the work is a decision both of us made. [Riley's partner] is an ex-worker as well. We don't really need that extra money any more.

At the moment, it's just people who call me. One guy, his name's 'Harry' ... 'Harry' usually comes to my house. He usually pays 250, but this time he didn't have it, he only had 150. He usually only goes for about 20 minutes. I said, 'Well, because you don't have 250 this time, it's only going for 10'. It's a fetish job ... I kick him ... I kick him in the balls and the head as hard as I can. I'm talking literally as *hard* as I can. I don't know why. I know that he hates himself. He likes me to call him ... what is it? Spastic? Spastic animal. That's what he likes me to call him, 'spastic animal'. And he likes me to spit on him as well.

He wanks himself and comes while I'm kicking him in the balls. I don't know how he does. I'm serious, they are the hardest kicks I can possibly kick and I can kick quite hard wearing metal cap shoes. He prefers metal cap shoes. I kick him in the face as well and leave marks and bruises and cuts. Yeah, his face is bleeding, the lot, he loves it.

In between my meetings with Riley, Harry had called and proposed Riley kick him to death.

I've still been doing some occasional regulars. I saw 'Harry', yes. He rang me up and said, 'What do you think about kicking me to death? I've been thinking about it all day. Would you do it?' I said, 'You are joking aren't you?' He said, 'No, I'm serious'. I said, 'Have you really thought this through?' What do I do with you when you're dead? You want me to go to jail for murdering you?' He said, 'Oh, I didn't think about that'. I said, 'I'd love to do it but obviously you haven't thought it through because I'm not willing to go to jail for the rest of my life just for a couple of hundred bucks'. But he came around and I kicked him and called him a dirty bastard and all that sort of shit. I think I kicked him a little bit too hard in the balls because his eyes went a bit wide. He got a bit shocked when I kicked him that hard.

He's not the weirdest customer I've had. I've shat in someone's mouth. He paid me 600 bucks and I probably did him about five or six times all up. I just felt like I was sitting on a toilet. I wasn't looking. I just had my eyes closed and did it ... that's all he wanted. He ate it.

I've pissed in someone's mouth and they drink it. There are a lot of people who are into urine – 'water sports'. It's just self-degradation ... They don't like themselves or they're repressed. It's traced back, you know, way back to your youth or even further back to when you're a baby.

There would definitely be a greater proportion of professional people into the kinkier stuff. It's the more middle class people into the normal one on one sex, just normal head-job or wham bam stuff. It's definitely the guys with a bit more money and maybe a lot more on their plates who are into the sort of stuff that is ... if you want to call it weird, you can call it weird. I don't know, maybe it's what they deal with in their everyday lives, they have to release it in some certain way and that's how they release it.

Similarly, Lisa continued to see the occasional client.

**Lisa:** It's an income. I look at it like a service. It's like somebody going to the shop and buying a loaf of bread, it's something they want, so they pay for it. Someone might want their car fixed, someone might want a service, they have somewhere to go. I used to see people quietly during the day, either down here or at home. They all knew the hours that I turned my phone off, everyone knows not to come to my door, there was never any hassles.

[I still have a few clients I see] maybe one a week, if that. Nothing like drastic. It just gets you by. You can't survive on \$200 a fortnight, it's ridiculous.

Interestingly, by the time I had managed to meet Jem for a third time (in late April 2005) she had had settled into a relationship with an older, married man who had left his wife to share an apartment with Jem. Despite her views on relationships with clients, her relationship with her housemate appeared to be based upon his sexual satisfaction and her ability to move away from her previously perilous position. Although she didn't love this man, Jem acknowledged that he had allowed her to leave the life she had been living when we had met the previous year – homelessness, heavy heroin use and constant street work. Jem was only occasionally working and had successfully entered the methadone program. She had plans to leave the street – although not necessarily the industry altogether.

**Jem:** I have no passion towards [this man] and I'm a passionate person. I'm not delusional – I love what he's done for me, I love that, but then again I know he wouldn't do it if the situation wasn't suiting his lifestyle I'd be still out there on the street you understand. I pay my way. I pay half the bills, half the rent, half of everything so I'm not getting no free ride here. I'm not delusional but I do believe now, James, I know he could go now [and] I wouldn't come out and get a habit again, I'm pretty strong.

I think [I know] what I'm going to do. I'm getting a boob job in three months and I'm going to start going to the gym, I'm going to start going three times a week again. I've got to start looking for a dancer that can teach me to dance. I haven't had a problem with the sex industry at all. I think it's a great industry if you use your head but I want to get out of the sex industry. I want to get into the entertaining industry. I haven't got a degree; I haven't got an education that I can fall back on in my 40s. I'm 30 years old, the way I see it I've got 10 or 15 years to make some serious dough, stripping is the way to go for me. If I stay out there on the streets using [heroin] in five years I'm not going to be able to make nothing. That's the path I've got to go down now and I want to go down that path, it's a good industry.

I suppose I've done the drug thing, so at least I don't think I'm missing out on anything and every now and again I do romance the idea of oh fucking hell I'll just go and use [heroin] but the harsh reality is all I need to do is to go past 'one of those dirty girls, [and think] 'yeah, in five years you're going to be like that.' It's enough to put the fear of God into me. Five years ago I never would have walked around with a missing tooth, I've been walking around a year without it [now], I used to say, 'oh, look at snaggletooth' [in relation to another girl]. I've done the things that I've sworn I would never do and I've done.

Like those examples provided by Riley, Lisa and Jem, some of those who participated in this project did not wish to leave the commercial sex industry but just the 'street' environment – an environment they found increasingly depressing and dangerous.

**Tina:** I haven't been working on the street. I've reached my point where I cannot, and will not, give them the pleasure of standing out there any more. They don't deserve it. I'm better than that so it's at a point where I'm not enjoying it, not that I ever enjoyed it, but I'm not even enjoying the money that I'm getting. The money that I'm getting it's not good enough. Just standing out there ... it got to me. [I was] having to have a line of speed to be able to get out there. A harmless tiny little line but when it gets to that then it's time [to leave it]. I've never been great at what I do ...

I'm not going to give them a free perv as they drive round and round. To be on show for them ... oh please. It used to be great until there were lots of girls down there doing everything cheap. Their whole look is cheap, you know, so for us [transsexuals], we put an effort in and you stand there and feel you're better than that. I am better than that and to stand there while they go around, you know, [is embarrassing].

Part time I'm doing that [working in a brothel]. Three to four days. It's whatever sort of hours you want. [It's work] on the premises. I'm slowing right down in that area. I'm moving more out [of sex work]. I spoke to [my support worker] today to get more information on other things. I know I can do it [office skills], I know I'm intelligent in that way but it's actually sitting down and starting it and looking at it when you are not familiar with it. But also I've got bills and stuff like that that I'm catching up with so you are still dealing with other things. Yeah, there's been

a drop off [in the money I'm earning] but you have a clearer mind. Like, even if it was hot tonight I couldn't bring myself to go down [to St Kilda] and work, so I doubt it very much even in summer that I will go back. I would have done it by now ... the weather's been great, so I would have done it by now. Yeah, there is the drop off of money but now that I'm in this place [subsidised housing] and I've got everything I need, you can take a drop off of money compared to what I used to be getting, \$2,000, \$2,500 a week. I can afford to live on \$600 - \$800 on the shifts [at the brothel]. I'm happy to do that. Your body gets a bit worn out, not only your body but the mental side of things gets really worn out. Because you have to go into work mode, it wears you out completely.

Paxton's desire to leave the street was directly related to his spiralling heroin use – a consequence of sharing a house with a heavily dependent worker whose patterns of heroin use had played a role in the escalation of Paxton's own habit. Further, Paxton felt that he was bearing an unfair burden in terms of meeting the financial requirements of *both* of their habits.

**Paxton:** The habit increased since I moved in with Alice and sort of covering butts for other people more [buying them heroin, 'looking after' them]. I had an issue like [with] just working and getting high but at the same time, thinking that this is the end of me wanting to do this too.

Home comes first, relationship second. It's her house and stuff like that but I got really worried about being sick. I covered her arse [when she was sick], I covered her arse more when she wasn't sick but I don't say that sort of stuff. As long as I don't get sick, it's okay sort of thing. But as soon as that happened I was thinking this is not going to last for me and then issues of, if I go on medication, if I go on bupe or methadone for the short term, it's going to change the dynamic of the house and it won't work for me to be there if she's using. I'm not going to score for someone, I'll help them out if they're sick [but] I don't have a relationship where we're in that together, we are not lovers. I want that separateness in my house and it's all sort of new still anyway, it's only been 4 months. But that's a long time too [and] it's not in a normal household where you've got your separate stuff. We work together. Psychologically, it's good to be working together, it's about supporting each other, it's great and I guess she's not your typical worker out there. She's quite together. But [lately it's been] pure [self] indulgence and laziness. When I first got sick I was thinking, fuck, I can't be sick. I was as sick as a dog when she was taking time off [for being sick] but I wasn't showing it because it's like when you've got an issue and you're angry, what's the point of the other person getting angry when it's not going to go anywhere so anger wasn't coming up – it was just the issue of being lazy.

I've been here long enough, since August last year [2003]. I'm not bullshitting, I'm proud being a sex worker, but I'm not keeping that sort of lifestyle. Like people have done it for years and years and used for years and years and lied for years

and years. I mean I could pack up tomorrow and be somewhere else, that's where my life's at. I'm happy to settle here but I don't want to be using and only having that. I wouldn't work for a medication and that's what heroin becomes and that's what all these girls are doing ... I have no guilt at having a habit. I can afford it. I'm never going to rob someone. I have no problem going out and doing that [sex work]. I think if I was going to stay here, I would want my own place and I can afford that through whoring. If I'm on the 'done, that's \$500 a night I can save, if I did a 7-day [methadone pick-up], that's \$3,500 a week I can save ... I'll have a deposit for my own place in Tassie with my mother. I'll still live here and I've got real estate. That's where I'm at with it. I'm having fun but it's got to change now.

This may sound a fanciful plan, the dreams of a drug dependent sex worker. To suggest as much is to deny the resolve that many bring to the streets. There are fewer workplaces that teach 'hard lessons' as quickly as the street. While it inevitably crushes the spirit of many of a worker, for others, it builds the inner strength that they have had to call upon each day that they work. True to his word, Paxton was soon making arrangements to leave the accommodation he shared with 'Alice', had entered a methadone program and was happily ensconced in a brothel that gave him a degree of respect sorely lacking on the street.

I'm on 'done, not working on the street at all, working in a parlour. I've travelled interstate to [sex] work and I'm moving out, I'll get my own place, it's all good, I'm really healthy and mentally much better.

[I'm not using heroin at all anymore]. I was hardly using before. I was, but only because I was around someone else using. I was using over \$200 a day but not 500 odd a day. It sounds like a lot but it's not ... it is but it's not because I was making \$600 a night.

So now I'm doing really well at the parlour, they really appreciate me and it's nice to get that. I needed to chill because I couldn't hang out in the same routine I had before. I wanted to change that. I have the set up where I can get takeaways [of methadone] so I can stay over at the parlour and do double shifts and fill in for people. They [the management] were saying, 'we're paying for your cab', like, 'we want to appreciate you.'

[I'm working] five days a week. Tuesday, Wednesday off. I rang them up last night to see if I could come in and they needed me. I don't want to be in that house [with my heroin-using housemate]. I was going to leave and stay in the parlour for three weeks before I left and I thought, no, just stay there because I sleep over on the weekends at the parlour. It's a beautiful place, they've got 6 rooms set up and it's all plush. I've got to be there at 10 in the morning, [so] instead of getting up at 8 and getting my dose [of methadone] in Chapel St and the train to South Yarra and then [from] South Yarra [to the parlour] and coming home ... I sleep over. It was predominantly [a] female [parlour] with trannies [but] the trannies are doing so well it's 50/50 now.

For Simon, leaving 'the life' was borne of necessity and the end result of the tireless efforts of numerous individuals and services concerned for his wellbeing. Simon openly admitted to a preference for unsafe sex, including while working. He had contracted hepatitis C some years earlier, as well as a number of STIs. The latter led to the intervention of the Melbourne Sexual Health Centre and an appointment with a counsellor at the Alfred Hospital Infectious Diseases Unit. Further, Simon's prodigious use of illicit drugs was becoming excessive, even by his own standards. The following excerpts were from our meetings between June and September 2004 and provide an insight into the loosening control that Simon exerted over his life.

**Simon:** *[Have you had any health problems with drugs or the sex work?]* All of the above. I've had everything you can get. I've had Hep C for over 10 years. The Hep C was a dirty needle. I can't tell when. I've done some disgusting things, picking [dirty needles] up from behind buildings. Besides generally getting run down, I got sick because of the ridiculous amounts of ice [crystal methamphetamine] we were using, that sort of thing happens.

I don't have [HIV], which is only sheer dumb luck or so they keep telling me. I'm very careless. I'm extremely high risk. I have unprotected sex. I have a preference for it. . . If someone says they're clean, then I'll believe them. I was in a relationship with a positive person, living with a positive person and I did have unprotected sex with him, yeah, roll the dice. I suppose it's stupid, isn't it?

*[Is it fatalistic? Is it thinking, 'If happens it happens, if it doesn't, it doesn't'.]* Maybe. I think probably the real [reason] . . . like I've dropped [overdosed] from smack more than a dozen times now. I know that a quarter [of a gram] is too much to do [but I still do it]. I don't know, maybe I'm just dumb. I don't know [if I have a death wish]. I don't know. I have a problem with depression and shit. I have issues.

By late August, Simon had been encouraged to take active steps to address his high-risk sex practices. However, despite continuing to have a somewhat blasé view of his health, his conversation revealed a history of self-harm, an indication of the extent of his depression and issues of self-esteem.

At the moment I'm seeing a guy at the Alfred, like an HIV infectious diseases prevention guy who's running a project. That came about through Melbourne Sexual Health [Centre]. I've had gonorrhoea a few times in the last few years and that comes up [on the data system]. There's someone called a contact tracer that makes contact with you and wants to know why you're having unprotected sex. I gave them my phone number and so if I get a bad test result back for any STIs they ring me and say come in because they won't tell you what it is over the phone. Usually contact traces are people that inform you that you've had sex with [an HIV positive person] and are HIV positive. So that's how I got [put] in contact with [the worker at the Alfred]. It's completely voluntary if you talk to him or not. He's a new young gay lawyer who is trying to do this good thing so I said I would talk to him.

It has been informative ... but it's not what they expected. They expected it was going to be people who have problems with housing ... living on the street and depressed or uneducated young guys who just don't know about sex and sexually transmitted diseases whereas it's turning out [that] it's the opposite. Most people he sees are quite aware of the risk and know a lot about HIV.

I haven't had a [HIV] test in two months. I had one yesterday so I'll know in the next little while, because I know I've had sex with positive people in the last two months – unprotected. That's my reason for not having a test – emotionally I would have been unable to do it in the last couple of months.

As opposed to the Alfred project worker's initial intention of involving Simon in a project focusing on STIs, the worker appeared to take on the role of counsellor. Although he thought it may have been the case, Simon was unaware as to whether the worker had any training or was skilled in counselling techniques. The consequences of this worker's efforts suggest that he was neither skilled nor trained. The extent of his depression and his use of drugs to drive away his thoughts came through in quite shocking fashion.

Basically we sit and talk. I do think it helps because he obviously has been trained in whatever he's trained in and asks questions in a leading way. He asks 'why' to make me think about what I've said or why something is like that. I can't think of an example from but something along the lines of self worth came up because of the amount of drugs I'm using and putting other people first and having self harmed [before] – that kind of thing. He was sort of digging at how I felt about me. When talking about me I put it as in like what my affect is on other people instead of saying exactly what I feel about myself. So he wanted me to sort of talk directly about what I felt about myself. I only remember things about emotions, like when somebody says he loves me ... I don't ever say I love anyone, I don't really get that close to anyone.

[*What's the self harm stuff?*] I was in a bad situation and I cut myself. Then when I was in detox this last time in Brisbane, [I did it] just to stop the horrible ... whatever it is inside me. I cut one of my wrists.

Last week I was trying not to use and things happened ... I was [sex] working and I was feeling used by that. I'm in a relationship I don't think I really want to be in anymore and I'd had a bad day. [The project worker at the Alfred] made me talk about things that I just don't talk about. Usually I just keep going, I don't pay attention to it or I use so much drugs that I don't think about it. So I cut my wrist and being such a big girls blouse I couldn't push the razor in deep enough to make any difference. I don't think it's suicidal but that's where the self worth thing came in.

He asked whether I was trying to kill myself. I said I don't think so but I don't care whether I do or not because I did it and sat there in the bathtub, blood running down my arm. I said if I had started to get cold and had laid down – because



you get cold and just lay down and then fall asleep, pass out – he said if that had happened I would have been dead. And then last month I did enough smack to probably kill myself except I've got such a big tolerance I was asleep for like 12 hours and woke up pinned for the next day and a half.

When we met in mid-September, Simon had returned to the Alfred Hospital on one further occasion. However, he remained ambivalent about the process. It was only encouragement from his support worker at RhED that had him concentrating on the need to take steps to address his circumstances.

I was supposed to go yesterday because Sally wanted me to. She suggested I needed to talk about what happened. I really need to address what these issues of mine are. There's definitely something serious going on. I was supposed to go yesterday morning at 11 but something happened and I didn't get there. I can't actually remember what happened yesterday morning now which is not very good.

I would've been [back to the Alfred] one more time. But we're just sitting and talking, we don't really seem to be accomplishing much. He's supposed to be addressing what my issues are as why I have these lapses of using protection, why I've had so much unprotected sex in the last couple of years. It might be just because I'm a dirty slag of a person I don't know. I don't see how talking to him is going to make me any more aware of the risks or make me use protection any more often than what I already do. I'm not too worried about it. It's not a waste of time obviously. I know I have to contribute to make anything happen ... but it just is not high on my priority list at the moment.

Although he had not engaged in any further incidents of self-harm, Simon's mental outlook remained concerning. With the support and encouragement of others, Simon made an appointment to see a psychiatrist, hopefully better equipped than the project worker at the Alfred, to address his problems. Unfortunately, he didn't keep the appointment.

I did consider deliberately overdosing the other day and if I had had enough money I probably would've had. I was coming down off all that ecstasy [which was terrible]. Especially whacking up as much as I did, 3 or 4 pills.

I have an appointment booked with a psychiatrist at the Centre Clinic, Fitzroy St. I had to get a regular GP so I've gone and seen a doctor and he referred me to the psychiatrist. I was supposed to go last week but I didn't turn up.

In the meantime, Simon's test results had returned from MSHC. These, however, were useless given that Simon had, once again, placed himself in a position where he would have to be re-tested to get any peace of mind.

They all came back clear. No STIs. My Hep C is still active, but it's in the moderate to high range now which is good, well it's better than it has been, not good, but better than it has been. But then they mentioned the three month window<sup>27</sup> and had I had unprotected sex prior to my last test within the three month window? I just happened to I had unprotected sex last night ... [laughter] So now I've got to have my tests done again and then three months down the track [I'll get my results]. It defeats the whole purpose.

A few months later, Simon had returned to his Island home where his family continued to live. Many months later, he was still there.

## BUILDING A NEW LIFE

Something very few people appreciate is the difficulties that illicit sex workers may face when attempting to build a new life away from the street. Of the fourteen individuals who worked with me on this project, the majority wanted to establish a life in which there was no need to rely on commercial sex to survive. However, only Emily and Lisa had succeeded to any real extent. Emily had succeeded through a combination of personal commitment and a willingness to seek assistance.

**Emily:** I haven't used heroin for over three years. I actually celebrate my Narcotics Anonymous first birthday on Friday. That means I have had no mind / mood altering drugs in 12 months. I've been with NA for three and a half years, but I've only had a regular amount of clean time. Like I had eight months up and I busted, went and took some speed. Then I had three months up and I went to smoke some pot. So it's been a consistent 12 months.

[NA was] great! It changed my life. I'd been to NA meetings a couple of times over the years, like, 'Yeah, yeah, yeah, whatever'. Then I just basically walked in one day and said, 'OK, smartasses, you tell me how to do it' ... I'll give it three months.

I usually go to about 3 [meetings] a week. I haven't been for about 2 weeks. I'm just too busy. Sometimes getting an early night in bed is more important. Sometimes I just crack the shits with it and you've just got to stay away. When I first came into recovery I did exactly what I was told, they said pray and I prayed. Sometimes I was so beside myself that, yeah, I would pray for change, that's all I could do sometimes. I think when you're at the end of your tether you go, 'what the fuck?' That's what it was like. But I'm an atheist. I cannot even fathom the thought of there being a God or a higher power but I have faith in faith. I believe if I wake up in the morning and pray I'm acknowledging the day and acknowledging myself or if I pray on something that I want to change as soon as I say it out loud I've acknowledged that I want to change. [It's] an affirmation.

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<sup>27</sup> For a HIV test to be effective, there must be a three-month time period between the test and the last incident during which the individual being tested was potentially exposed to the virus.

Emily is completing a TAFE diploma and working part-time.

I went and did vocational training through the Commonwealth Rehab Service, CRS. Say you have a work accident or acquired brain injury or something, they retrain you. For example, say you were a plumber and you can't get on a roof again they'll teach you computer studies. They take in people with drug addiction but you need a secondary complaint like depression or anxiety and they took me on as a client. They take you right through and do assessments. Basically if you've always wanted to dance they'll pay for dancing lessons, whatever it takes to build your esteem.

I'm in second year, doing a Diploma of Community Services Welfare Studies at TAFE. It's a two-year course. I did full time last year, and I did my placement and then [my placement managers] offered me part-time work, so I've got part-time [study] second year. Next year all I've got is two subjects and my second year placement, so I'm about 80 per cent of the way there.

I get the Diploma and get my foot in the door. Experience is a big thing. That's why I took on part time work ... I'm too old and too broke to go uni. I'm not willing to do the four years. Two years is fine to go back to school, but [any more than that]? I'm 31 and it's like, well, I wanted to do Architecture, [but] I'm not going to Uni, I'm too old to spend 4, 6 years. Let's get practical and get into the workforce.

[*What was behind the decision to do Welfare Studies?*] It all came together. I thought because I was so good at rorting ... This was my logic. I was so good at screwing the system that I thought if I jump the counter I'll probably make an effective worker. So it wasn't kind of this overwhelming magnanimous, 'I'm going to help other people' thing. I mean that's coming now that I feel more useful ...

I can't see myself doing strictly welfare forever. I'd like to do maybe psychology/ behavioural psychology / anthropology. If I could see myself doing anything, ultimately I'd like to be a Doctor of Anthropology ... but welfare was a good, safe kind of career that I would be OK at. And the subject matter leaves it pretty open. I mean you do psychology and sociology and law, so it kind of leaves it pretty open to go on and do anything else. It's not closing doors...

Lisa had succeeded in leaving all but the occasional client behind with the committed assistance of a worker at RhED. The worker in question had been influential in Lisa acquiring secure accommodation, pharmacotherapy to address her heroin dependency and, most importantly, the motivation and desire to take active steps to change her life for the better.

**Lisa:** [My worker] got me my place through Transitional Housing in June last year [2003]. On the 1st of August [2004] I moved in. I was on the [Office of Housing] waiting list from the 10th of June, so from the application getting backdated from the 10th of June, I received my letter on the 10th of June this year telling me that I've been accepted into Ministry of Housing. So it was 12 months to the day.

When I moved [to my new apartment] in August, I was still using pretty flat out. I had a couple of regulars that use to come up to my flat, so working on the street slowed down. Then I started reducing my heroin use ... I was on 400 [dollars a day] and I had got down to 200 a day by the time I asked Sally to get me onto the methadone. I'd reduced half of my heroin use and then substituted methadone for the other half.

I was put on the housing list as a priority one. [The place I'm in now] is a one bedroom unit. It's one of four units in a row. I'm on a corner and I've got my own front yard, back yard. I was quite lucky [in terms of furnishing my apartment]. I had my double bed and I had the utensils, like cutlery and things like that from my old [transitional housing] place in South Yarra. You were allowed to take the knives, forks and things like that, plates, kettle, toaster because those things can't really be reused by the next tenant. That's a part of your package when you move into a transitional [house] they'll give you cutlery and things. With the washing machine and fridge I was lucky that [my boyfriend] had one. His family gave us a couch and a couple of chairs. And I had a few things like the TV, a microwave, a little coffee table, dining table so I've basically got everything. [My worker] gave me a \$100 voucher for Salvation Army [shop] and we went down and I got some curtains and a desk, which was brand new, a table and a bench for outside, a little park bench seat.

[There's good public transport]. I'm a two minute walk from the tram. I have a bus outside my house that pretty much takes me to Northland Shopping Centre or it takes me to Reservoir, the main shopping street, and the train station is nearby so we've got all sorts of transport.

[Having stable housing] has taken the biggest weight off my shoulders. It's better than going out during the day and thinking, 'shit is my room going to be safe? Are my clothes going to be there when I get home?' It got to the point where I couldn't have jewellery or anything because if I had a gold ring it was going to get stolen. Now I've got my own house, I've done it up the way I like, according to my own tastes. I can come and go as I please. I don't have to explain to anybody. I have my rent paid each fortnight. It's made me more independent and put me back into the community ... There's no such thing as living normal but it's given me a better way of living. If you're not stable in [terms of] where you're going to sleep each night what else can you do? You need stable ground to be able to build on everything else.

And build on everything else was just what Lisa was in the process of doing ...

I'm doing a course, a work for the dole course, so that occupies me ... and going for interviews. It's an admin course, office admin. Mondays and Tuesdays at Job Co [Employment Services Inc.]. It's 9.00 to 5.00, just computers, internet... job search in the mornings for half an hour and type up resumes, job letters and stuff. It's a non-profit organisation where, say, the YMCA, for instance, want letters to

be mailed out. We do all that sort of stuff for organisations ... it's not for profit, so they don't pay us. They just have to supply the stuff, the envelopes, letters, stickers and stamps and we do the rest.

I want to get into a traineeship in reception. I finish in September, so it's not too far to go. And I'm still young enough to be doing traineeships. When I look on the internet for the jobs, some of them have junior and some have traineeships. The junior ones are generally [available to those] under 20. I think it's 'cause they don't want to pay adult wages. When you come across the traineeship ones, they're not generally too fussy.

Hopefully I've got a job before [the course finishes in September]. At least a one or two year traineeship. I'm also looking at basic retail sales work. They're the two jobs that I'm looking at getting into. I'm hoping to get full time work rather than casual or part time. I had an interview two weeks ago. I was unsuccessful but I was happy that out of all the applications that they received, they narrowed it down to four, I was one of four that they interviewed, so I was quite happy.

[Does having a criminal record get brought up?] I'm not applying for jobs that tell me on the ad that they do criminal checks. Centrelink don't even know that I used to have a drug habit. They don't know that I was on heroin or anything 'cause that can be put through on my file and that can quite easily be a big discrimination against me. Out of sight, out of mind basically. They're hiring you for the job, they're not hiring you for what your past is or where you've gone wrong. Fair enough they do criminal checks. I can understand if you're working in retail or something where you're working on registers, you've got to do criminal checks because you could have been a thief ... but I still think drug addiction, they shouldn't need to know if it doesn't affect the position. For instance if I had a job, it will be OK because I'd be able to get my methadone. I'd have three takeaways and two days I'd have to organise to go down before or after work or on lunch break. Either way, they don't need to know because it's not affecting my hours of working and it's not affecting my work itself.

I'm constantly applying for jobs. I've been for a couple of interviews but I've been unsuccessful ... you've got to be in it to win it basically. I'm not going to get down over it because it means obviously that the right job hasn't come along for me yet, so when it does ...

I've always been pretty good with times. If I have to be at a doctor's appointment at 12 o'clock I'll be there even if it's an early start. When I was swimming I used to be at the pool at 5:30 in the morning, swim from 6 till quarter to 8 and then go to school. I did that 3 days a week and that's a lot of discipline. I think it's just basically getting yourself back into a routine again. You know the time you have to be there, so you have to work out how long it takes you to get ready in the morning, how long it's going to take you to get there and then you get up and do it. If you want an income you've got to work.

While the efforts of these women are inspiring, they have been blessed with strong self-belief and support. They had also spent a relatively short period working on the street. In contrast, Mia has spent the greater period of her life involved in illicit sex work and attempting to manage her drug use. When we first met, Mia was working part-time at an NSP and studying for a drug and alcohol studies certificate at TAFE. She was not using drugs and was not working on the street (although she continued to see the occasional regular client). What happened over the next six months as we continued to meet was of great personal disappointment to her, as despite all the rhetoric she had heard about providing sex workers with 'pathways out', Mia found herself back onto the street so as to earn an income. The following excerpts from the series of conversations we had provides a vivid example of just how hard so many workers try to leave the 'trade' only to have their attempts frustrated, their self-esteem damaged and their pleas for assistance frustrated.

**Mia:** It's not something that you easily get out of, prostitution and drugs. I've been using drugs for 25 years and I'm still on methadone, I'll admit I've still got a bit of a problem with it. I don't know why, I really don't. I think it's harder when you've been a user for 20 something years ... I might have a hit once a month. I don't know, I like to keep me finger in the pie, in that criminal element. But I've got to have it in a straight pie as well. It becomes your life, it really does.

I used to work at Prostitutes Collective. I've been in St Kilda for 30 years and I'm pretty known. I sat on that AGSPAG [Attorney-General's Street Prostitution Advisory Group] committee for 12 months. I wasn't getting paid, [like the other committee members] would have been all getting paid ... and that whole 12 months, they spoke about exiting prostitutes out of the industry and that whole year I got offered nothing [work wise]. Then I had a court case come up and I got jailed [*laughing*]. I ended up writing this letter to [a committee member] from jail, it was so abusive. I put shit in it like, maybe if you had've offered me a bit of outreach work or something, I wouldn't be fucking sitting in jail now. You talked about trying to get us out of [street work] ...

When this job finishes in September, I don't know if they're going to offer me anything else. If they don't, I'd just go back to work again ... I'm going to poke around for some outreach work. A lot of the girls know me and respect me. They like me and talk to me and stuff. I've been asking around St Kilda, Sacred Heart Mission and all that but a lot of them say, 'I think you're too close to the issue', so it doesn't get me anywhere. It shits me 'cause it just pushes you out again, 'Fuck it, I might as well go and work then'. Especially when they're talking about trying to exit us out of the industry.

There's quite a few girls on the street that want to stop working but to work with the girls, you've got to work with them really full on. You can't just say, 'Be here at 2.00 o'clock', you've got to go and find them, stuff like that. They won't come to you. I'd like to be working with one or two girls 'cause that's all you can handle.

Just start, if they want to, with detox / rehab or get them on programs and then maybe re-educate. It can be done, but it would take years and you'd have to be working very closely with them. Almost your whole job would revolve around that one or two workers. That's what I'd like to do.

By our second meeting, Mia had three weeks of employment remaining at the NSP.

That's it. I don't know what will happen then, if they'll offer me some outreach work or what. My boss hasn't said anything. It was only originally a three-month contract but it got extended to six months. I wonder what will happen in the next few weeks, if I'll get offered anything. The only thing they'd probably offer me is outreach work. I'd be happy with that.

I still [sex] work, I still see private clients. I often wonder if [the legal employment] finishes if I'll end up working again back on the streets. It sort of would worry me a bit, I don't know, it's just like riding a bike, you've done it once ... and I can work without using so it's more money. It's not as if I get back into working I'm back in that using trap again. It just won't happen. I rung up Melbourne Foot Patrol and I've got the girl's name from in there. I'm going to give her a ring in a few weeks, I know someone that works in there and he put in a good word for me so I'm hoping I might be able to get a bit of outreach doing that in the city.

Although continuing to swear off heroin use, Mia acknowledged that it was a struggle and that it was external factors strengthening her resolve to refrain from using heroin. Still, she admitted that she had 'dabbled' recently. Further, the temptation is evident in her words below.

I still chuff [marijuana] I think I'll always chuff but no, I can't [afford to think about heroin], I'm still fighting my addiction. I'm still on methadone and I dabbled a bit the other month. I can't go there, I just can't. It's too easy for me to slip back into it and go fuck everything ... plus I know in the back of my mind if I get a habit again I know what it's going to bring: work and hocking things. I can't stand using and hanging out and working.

I don't think I could ever get into it again. I mean I've still got a bit of a problem, but my ultimate goal is to not be on any maintenance program, to be off methadone. I mean I'm only on 10 mls so I've been dropping. I've only been on it about 8 months this time. I know people 15 to 17 years on it. I don't want to have to be on a maintenance program all my life.

My daughter knows, like she keeps asking me why I go to the chemist. She goes what is that stuff at the chemist and I say it's just medicine that I need. When you're a bit older I'll explain to you ... yeah my daughter keeps me together. I couldn't keep a habit going with my daughter. I couldn't do it again. I don't think I could do it. I can see what would happen – I'd get back into working and I'd start using and I'd probably start dealing again and then jail would happen.

I've had a few [conventional] jobs here and there. I was working in a coffee shop in St Kilda Rd. That was good. It was 10.00 – 2.00 pm \$200 cash in hand a week. It was perfect for school hours and all. I lasted a month or so. I don't know what happened. I was just, fucking how do people do this for 30 years? Go to work every day? I don't know how people do it. I was leaving my car at my daughter's school and getting the tram in and you see the same people every day. They're so miserable when they get on [the tram], I just think how the fuck does someone do the same job for 20 or 30 years. You just exist for the system, like a fucking robot to the system. I lasted a few months in that job but then I chucked it and went back to [street] work.

By late September, Mia's employment contract at the NSP had come to an end. She found herself working the street again in order to make ends meet.

The job's finished. That's it, it's finished. I was pretty upset actually. I was in tears when I left. I didn't let them see that, but when I got outside I had a bit of a cry and thought, 'shit, here we go, now what?' I've been working on the street a bit. Yeah I've been a bit down lately. I don't know, I'm thinking I'm worthless you know what I mean, all that sort of shit. I've only been out three times. I went out during the day and got down here about 11.30 and by 3 o'clock I hadn't made a cent. I think I'd spoken to two cars. It was shocking. I left at 3:30

I was just disgusted. I think it took three hours to get my first job. Night was a bit better but I don't think I left till 6 in the morning. I think I done four jobs. I think I had \$420 on me but that took till 6 o'clock and I got here about 11. A few other girls I was yakking to said they're starting to come out at 3 in the morning but then everyone starts to get the same idea.

I get [my daughter] to stay at a friend's place or my son looks after her. I just say I'm going out. And that's the other thing too. My son is so proud I'm going to school and that I was working [in legitimate employment]. I'd hate him to see me out on the street working again. As soon as the school holidays finish I'm going to drop my resume at the Salvos and at Smith St. Just to try and get some needle exchange work.

I've been knocking around all the [working] girls again and, fuck, I'm getting scared. I'm getting scared I'm going to start using again. I haven't been dabbling, no, no. I'm getting scared that I'm going to fall in a hole. I've been knocking around a lot of the working girls again and that sort of comes with being back at work. Oh yeah, [they're all using] every one of them. Fuck yeah.

I've been doing my jobs up at the 'Blue House' so that's been getting really hectic with police. It's run by the rooming house group. There's no dealing there, maybe a bit of chuff but no powders. A few of the girls have got rooms there too. But some of the guys that live there let you use their room, you just give them \$10. It helps them out and you're safe. I wouldn't do car jobs at all. I got asked for a few but I



said I've got a room but some guys won't go back to a room. They've been robbed and shit's happened to them. And plus the Blue House is getting a bad name. I think they've been robbed and hassled, things have happened there. So many clients won't go there even though nothing has happened to them, they just don't like the feeling of the place. The cops are starting to hang around there a lot.

[The cheap hotels are] all gone. Oh you can still ... there's Elwood Sands but it costs \$90 or \$100. It's a bit dear. And you're still at risk because you're on your own, even though there's a reception they're not there all the time so you're still at risk. I remember years ago there was a girl attacked in a Motel on Canterbury Rd. She picked up the phone but there was no 24-hour reception. I'd prefer to pay \$10 and use someone's room and then your client knows that there's people around too and they can't try anything.

[*So much for pathways out*]. That's right. That's why I've been really upset you know. But then again something might be there that I don't know about. There might be some money coming, I don't know it all seems to be about money ... Like this fucking really pissed me off like I fucking cried again over it. I've just been bawling heaps lately.

It really shits me too because a lot of the girls say, I mean I'm nothing fantastic, but even Sara goes, 'they should have people like you working at RhED or on outreach. They're a bunch of fuckwits.' Because they've seen me out working [legally], the girls, and they go, 'fuck what are you doing back around?' I just go, 'I was working, the job's finished and fucking here I am.'

The next time I met Mia, in mid-October, she was still seeking out legitimate employment in drug-related community services. She had to leave to attend an interview in Smith Street at 4.15, a meeting she was very nervous about.

Quite a few people at school applied for it as well. They saw it advertised as well but they didn't get any calls back for an interview so [I'm hopeful]. I hate job interviews, oh man, I really hope there's not like a whole panel of them. When I went for a job when [the Prostitutes Collective] changed to Inner South [Community Health Services] there were seven people. I fucking freaked when I walked in, I thought oh my God and everyone of them fired all these questions at me. I lost it. I knew straight away I didn't get it. It's funny when nerves get to you, you know, you just can't think.

Before the interview, Mia was going to go to work on the street (we met at about 10 in the morning). The weather was warm and she was hoping for better 'luck' than her previously reported experiences.

I'm going to go out to work now. There'll probably be a lot of girls around. I worked Saturday night, that was alright. I made about \$400. That was the first night I've been out in weeks. I've been down during the day but not much. Nothing's changed, it's still the same. Now the hot weather's coming on there'll be girls everywhere.

A lot more sexual activity happens outdoors when it's hot. Especially at night because you get a lot of people on foot cruising around. It must be a voyeurism thing, I don't know. But then a lot of clients want a room too. I prefer to have a room, especially if I'm doing sex. I don't mind doing oral in the car and most clients just want it in the car because it's quick. I prefer to have a room for sex but I don't push [for] sex when I work. I try and do a lot of oral, full oral. Then I don't have to go back and use a room. When I worked Saturday night, I actually felt a bit scared for the first time. Probably because that girl was murdered recently. I won't do car jobs at night anymore, no way.

I busted myself. I've been using a bit ... I'm not going there again. Fuck, I was pissed off. I've been knocking around all the girls again. I gave a chick a lift out to St Albans the other day to get on. I was in two minds about it and she was going to hitchhike so I thought, fuck, come on then, I'll give you a lift. So then she laid a taste on me. I think it's being back working and hanging around again. I can't afford it. I can't afford to fall back into using. I was really pissed off with myself. Yeah, it was only that one day.

By late November, Mia was still without employment. Although she felt her control over her future loosening, she was still seeking a 'straight' job.

I went for that job interview at the Salvos [for a position at the Needle and Syringe Program] and I didn't get it, oh mate, shit that put me on a downer. I haven't picked up using at all, no I haven't been using but I thought fuck I may as well go back and be a fucking whore you know? I kept crying for days. I was like, fuck, if I can't get a job handing out needles what hope have I got? [The manager] goes, 'you'd be great as peer educator', not doing this basically. I have been struggling with school, it's quite hard school, it really is. I couldn't do it again, no way.

I asked [the NSP manager], 'what did I do wrong in the interview?' She said I didn't speak professional enough, you know, all that jargon you've got to use, all those bloody big term words. I can't talk like that ever. I said okay fair enough alright. She said try and be a little bit more professional in answering. Then the other day I thought, 'fuck this going to school, it's not even helping' RhED have offered me nothing you know, I mean even to drive the girls around or drive anybody around ... anything. So I thought fuck I may as well go back to what I know. Then I thought, 'no I'm going to keep going because I'm really strong willed'. I mean it would have been so easy to just fall in a heap and go and use but I'm determined. It's almost like people push you back to where you were ... why bother even trying.

I've been working over the past month actually. I'm going to work tonight too. I've been working about once a week. Friday night and I've been coming out during the day a bit, not a great deal. I done alright actually. I was quite surprised. Probably because I'm not working much now so they think there's a new face, they'll jump at it.

Despite her growing despair, Mia had been to yet another interview that morning, this time as a worker with Foot Patrol [an outreach service in the CBD].

I had the interview this morning. That was with Dave who I'd worked with at the PCV and these two other chicks, I don't know who they were. I think I went alright but I didn't answer everything in full. They asked me what are some of the issues facing drug users in the CBD and what I should have said was there's nowhere safe for them to inject but I didn't say that. I said they've got issues accessing health and homelessness, all that sort of stuff. I couldn't think. The nerves.

I feel like ringing up and asking, do you think I should or should I just wait? I don't know. I think I did alright. I hope I did. I don't know, if I don't get this I don't know, it's really going to, fuck I don't know, I think it really will push me back into work full on. I just think, fuck, I've got nothing to offer, I can't even get a job. I'm just shit. Maybe I haven't got anything to offer people.

I'm starting to question myself a lot. I'm not good with all that talk and all that jargon and all those big words and that but I know how to talk to my peers. You know I'm starting to question myself now ... it's fucked.

The thing with the street, I don't mind working but I'm starting to think more about my daughter and getting seen out there. These two friends she hangs around with, their parents live in St Kilda, work in St Kilda ... When I was working the other day I was, like, hiding. I couldn't work properly. I mean I'm not ashamed of it but I don't want my daughter's friends' parents to go, 'you can't play with that girl anymore' because they might have seen me out. That's starting to come into my head a lot more. I mean with my son I wasn't worried about it so much and he got exposed to it all and he found out the wrong way and it was bad. [How?] Oh, the coppers told him. Yeah, 'your mother's a fucking whore'. He was about 10 or 11.

I've been thinking a lot more about going back to a brothel. If I don't get a job in the next month I've decided I'm going to go back to work. I'm going to go back to brothel work three days a week. I'm just going to immerse myself in it again. I just thought fuck it but this time I'll do better because I'm not using so I'll be able to save a lot more. I don't want to. It's so hard to change your life, fuck it is.

That Salvos thing shattered me. I thought, 'fuck why do you need a fucking degree to hand out syringes'. I'll keep going but you keep getting knocked back for so much stuff and in the end I'll just think fuck it all. I chuck school in, I'm over it, go back to work in a brothel. I just sensed from them that they feel I'm a bit of a risk.

In August of 2005, Mia was in employment within the social services sector, had stopped using heroin and was no longer forced to engage in the work she was so desperate to avoid and so depressed to have returned to when we last met previously. She had also earned a diploma in drug and alcohol studies.

# CONCLUSION

# 15



STREETWALKING BLUES

- SEX WORK, ST KILDA AND THE STREET

CONCLUSION

## CONCLUSION

How do you conclude such a project? You can't really. The lives of the participants have continued to unfold – there haven't concluded. Some of my partners in this project have left street-based sex work. Others haven't. Some have relapsed into heavy drug use and others are now 'clean'. Nonetheless, they continue to lead lives in which their work is just one of the activities and experiences that make each of them just who they are. It can only be hoped that you've taken the time to read though and appreciate those who gave of themselves as people and not as sex workers, as individuals and not 'an issue'. It's only once we're able to see those involved in sex work as the individual members of our community that they are, that we might start to address the dangerous nature of the unregulated sex industry and revisit the need for constructive policy action.

Perhaps an appropriate means of concluding this report is to revisit the *10 Reasons to Decriminalise Street Prostitution*, that public document written and distributed by the then Prostitutes Collective of Victoria and used in the introductory section of this report to provide some insight into the context within which participants lived their lives:

### 1. Prohibition does not work.

**Simone:** The police? Yeah, there were a few incidents. One night they pulled me up, they never told me that they were undercover cops and I told them the prices and they said 'busted'. I said 'why?' They said we're undercover cops. They'd drive up to us sometimes and say, 'stay safe, have a good night' and then another time they'd say, 'you'd better get off the corner now or we're going to book you' ... I walked from Grey St to Carlisle and I'm hanging off the corner there and the same cop drove past. I said, 'well you told me to get off that corner, I'm on this corner here now.' Two times in less than a year [I was charged] for soliciting. Yeah twice.

### 2. Decriminalising allows sympathetic planning initiatives.

**Simone:** [A safe house] would be good. If there was men there to keep an eye on things, to let the clients know hey [that's not on] because if there's only ladies there then the men think they can do anything. They would have to register the sex workers. That would be good. Make a few more houses like that, not just with two or three bedrooms, quite a few. That's a good idea.

### 3. Decriminalisation will aid in preventing violence.

**Mia:** I remember the first time I got raped and I went to St Kilda Police Station. It was years ago, it wasn't the new [station]. I went in and they said, 'Well, fuck, what do you expect? You're a fucking prostitute'. I just went, 'See you later'. That's why half the time you don't bother.

#### 4. Decriminalisation will stop a costly legal merry-go-round.

**Mia:** I've been in jail about three times, and it's all for bloody 'loiters' and fines. I got locked up in 2002 and there was about 12 working girls there just for pissy little shit ... And as soon as they get out of jail, they just come straight back down here, there's no [support in place] I was only locked up a while ago and my daughter was coming out visiting me when she was 10. It was only 5 months, it was just fines, fucking fines man. Loiters and PERIN court fines and they jailed me. I couldn't believe it.<sup>28</sup> When I got out to jail, I knew half the girls out there and I said, 'I don't know if I want to say what I'm here for, I'm in for bloody fines'. Just pathetic shit.

#### 5. Decriminalisation will increase the effectiveness of HIV education.

**Emily:** You give a bit of oral to get them hard without the condom and then whack it on to finish the job because some guys have problems getting erect. I don't know. There's a myth about AIDS [on the street], not taking into account sores around your mouth or if your teeth are falling out, that if you get pre-come in your mouth your stomach acid will kill all the [virus] anyway.

#### 6. Decriminalisation will enable the community to focus on drug addiction amongst street prostitutes.

**Jem:** Being a sex worker, drugs go hand in hand with that. I used to get really pissed off at the drug stigma attached to prostitution, but it really is [a fact]. Ninety-nine per cent of men that pick you up [ask] straightaway, 'Are you on drugs?' Of course I'm on drugs, why do you think I'm out here you know ... Once in a blue moon, you'll have a client that wants to score, but it's usually a guy who's got drugs who wants to do a swap you know what I mean? That happens heaps ... I'll say probably every fifth or sixth car that does stop down there would be a drug dealer or a guy with drugs wanting to, you know, do a swap with drugs. A lot of times on the weekends I'll be down there and all those guys [will be] driving around, drug dealers handing me numbers. You know, you get all excited that you're getting a job and it's just some idiot giving you a number for drugs.

#### 7. Decriminalisation will aid in uncovering and addressing homelessness and poverty.

*Jem was living at The Hub, a cheap boarding house primarily used by the transient homeless. She had been evicted from transitional housing because she was continuing to engage in illicit sex work.* **Jem:** \$160 a week. It's that jammed in there, like, you have to go outside to change your fucking mind it's that small. It's sad, you know, them places. Hanover, at least there they've got social workers and that, so they'll go that extra step for you like transitional, whatever. These boarding

<sup>28</sup>The PERIN (Penalty Enforcement by Registration of Infringement Notice) Magistrate's Court is that Court that deals with processing and enforcement of infringement notices and penalties).

houses, there's no social work schemes, so there's nowhere to go for these people, they're stuck in limbo. And so like when I go there, I get that depressed ... I won't walk in that door unless I've got gear on me.

**8. Decriminalisation will alleviate the stigma associated with street prostitution.**

**Tina:** I just don't like to be seen. It's died down there in a way of it's just not enough [money to be worth it]. I'm not going to give them a free perv as they drive round and round. To be on show for them ... oh please. I am better than that and to stand there while [the mugs] go around and around ... just being seen is what I hate. I think now that I'm 30 I've reached a point where I just don't want to be seen down there.

**9. Decriminalisation will keep families together and decrease State Government child protection costs.**

**Ollie:** Once I get my kids when they turn 16 I'll move to a three bedroom. First I have to do a couple of things and get to know my daughter. I haven't seen her since she was 5. She's 10 now. Five years I haven't seen her but she knows she's put hope inside of me. That's what makes me keep going, knowing that my kids have hope for me because I want to spoil my kids, I just haven't got the dough.

**10. Decriminalisation will dramatically decrease the number of street prostitutes within five years.**

**Mia:** I'd like to see something that's run by workers ... and professionals as well, but more on a casual basis, not so much politics, bullshit and rules and something open 24 hours a day ... if you get to know the girls, the trust happens... do you know what I mean? I'd love to see something like that. I really would.

For as long as illicit street sex work remains a criminal activity under the current legislative regime, the means of developing the sort of trust that Mia refers to will be a distant hope, particularly as regards mainstream services. Furthermore, mainstream services will find it difficult to access street-based workers while their 'criminal' status provides cause to hide one's involvement in such activities. It is only once specialist agencies are able to provide services and strategies such as detoxification and exit and retaining programs for street-based sex workers that any sustainable improvement in the circumstances of these workers will occur. While sex work of any type remains a criminal offence this is highly to happen. Enough said.

## EPILOGUE

Much had changed when I met Simone for the last time in December, almost two months after our previous meeting. She had decided to return to the street after seemingly achieving the life that she had long wanted.

I needed money, I just needed it. I ended up getting two jobs that night which gave me a bit of money. My plans were for food and everything but then I thought no, I just enjoyed myself that night. Yeah two jobs. I met this lovely young man from England and he's got my phone number for another time. Then this other man as soon as I got to the corner of Robe and Grey St, this man pulled up.

This was Monday night this week. So I made about \$280 and I blew it all on myself. I got myself a taste of speed. You know how I do it, just have it every now and then. I went to the pokies and had a good time and met this man down the pokies, and he tried to go cheaper with the prices and I said no, no, and then he wanted to spend the whole day with me and I said not unless you're going to pay for me ... I will be doing it again. It's so easy once you've done it.

[It was the first time in] nearly two years [but] once you've done it, it just pops in your head. I found myself in the shower getting ready, putting on a skimpy dress, skimpy but nice, and the make up and then I walked out of here about midnight. I know I will be doing it again because it's just so easy ... when the weather warms up again.

I don't [drink much]. That I have to keep away from Jeremy. I was talking to my doctor about that the other day, I said Jeremy has to realise that I am a sociable drinker and because he's not a drinker, he doesn't like it, I've stopped drinking because of him. Every fortnight when I get my pay I always get \_ dozen cans or a dozen and that's behind Jeremy's back. I have to make sure I do it on a day that he's not going to come down so I haven't got alcohol breath on me. I think it's not fair in a way. He's not a drinker because he had a problem with his Dad when he was growing up. Like with speed and that, I'm doing that behind his back. So he's putting a bit of pressure on me. I think that's one reason why I went out the other night too. A bit of freedom. And he says the same thing about pokies – and that's why I spent my money on pokies.

I do the speed behind his back. I had a hit the other day. Just have to make sure that that [bruise] goes ... I've got this cream and if you've got bruising or whatever it takes the bruising away. I don't like doing it behind his back but it's my freedom and I will be doing it again. [If I told him] it would destroy our relationship and then I'd get so depressed. When he broke up with me that time, the way he just bought my stuff back from his house was really traumatic for me. I stayed here for 8 weeks bawling my eyes out. I became a recluse and that would be damaging.



It's like a split personality now I've got. I'm already thinking pretty soon I'll go out again. Jeremy doesn't drive around St Kilda. The other night on Monday night I stayed here until about 10:30 because he rings me up. If he's not around me on Sunday I might work, I don't know.

It's not the first time that I've had it on my mind since I've been back with Jeremy. I've had it on my mind all the time we've been together. I need the money, I wish I could do it. Because I've been with him I've not done it and then just for some reason the other night I thought stuff it I'm broke, I've got no money. It's the first time that I've worked since we've been together and plus I think it's because he's putting pressure on me, you're not allowed to do this, not allowed to do that ... He's just protecting me, not doing it to be a prick, just looking out for me. I can understand that but I still do need my bit of freedom. I don't mind that I haven't got friends or anything. I prefer it that way but I'm starting to think he goes out with his friends and leaves me at home. I do like it but I think that's why I'm branching out a bit now. I want to have that little bit of freedom.

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