



STREET SEX WORK - Information Sheet

A Brief History of Street Prostitution in St Kilda:

1788 - 1880

- * Prostitution arrived in Australia with the First Fleet
- * Gold rush attracted prostitutes to Victoria and the Goldfields

1880 - 1900

- * St Kilda became one of the wealthiest suburbs in Victoria.
- * In 1886 prostitutes were ordered to leave Acland St because society deemed such characters should not be allowed to reside in St Kilda.
- * 1870s and 1880s- Melbourne's first tolerance areas created in certain city streets.

1930s

- * Police raids in Little Lonsdale St in 1932 pushed prostitution southwards. Though prostitution was not in itself illegal, some prostitutes were sent to convents to mend their errant ways such as the Good Shepherd at South Melbourne.
- * St Kilda became a convenient place for prostitutes to solicit because of the mobility that cars allowed, the depressed economy, and nearby entertainment facilities, alleys and parks.
- * In 1935 South Melbourne Council passed a by-law prohibiting soliciting which moved more women to St Kilda. In 1937, St Kilda Council passed a by-law prohibiting a prostitute soliciting or accosting anyone or loitering in a public place.

1940s

- * Street prostitution was not common until the Second World War and the establishment of army barracks at Albert Park. Public concern increased over the presence of street prostitutes in St Kilda Rd and Fitzroy St as a result.
- * Extra fines proved to be no deterrent. Police powers against prostitutes who solicited were increased and more severe penalties imposed, still to no avail. By 1944 police recognised that Fitzroy St was the centre for street prostitutes who took their clients to Albert Park Reserve, Dalgety, Barkly and Loch St had permanent brothels.
- * In 1946 prostitution became a prominent feature of St Kilda and Council requested additional attention from the vice squad due to an increase in sex workers on Fitzroy St. Residents asked for increased lighting by Council hindered by the war shortage of globes and light fittings.

1950s

- * In the early 1950s overall prostitution levels dropped as part of an Australian wide post war economic boom and a reduction in demand due to servicemen returning home. However, street prostitution increased as sex workers needed to solicit more publicly and visibly in order to attract clientele. This also resulted in increased complaints about gutter crawling and claims by local female residents about harassment in particular streets by men in cars.
- * This resulted in police blitzes, campaigns and changes to the law. By the 1960s, street prostitution was concentrated solely in St Kilda.

1970s

- * The average age of prostitutes decreased throughout the 70s. Vulnerable youths resorted to sex work and drug use, as there was no legitimate source of Government money available to those under 16. Some were victims of incest, neglect and domestic violence and would drift to St Kilda after being forced out of home or school.
- * Residents argued about ways of dealing with prostitutes and confrontations became fierce.
- * In 1977, female Councillors pushed for prostitution to be viewed as a commercial arrangement between consenting adults rather than as immoral.
- * The Prostitutes Action Group also formed in 1978, later renamed Hetaira, who argued against laws discriminating against sex workers. Opposing groups clashed at a Council organised forum on prostitution and action groups monitored the streets at night, filing reports and noting a lack of police action.
- * The largest police operation 'Zeta' was launched in 1979. It questioned over 3000 people and booked hundreds of people. Police claimed, "The riff raff will not be allowed back into St Kilda." The St Kilda Residents Group was formed by residents who claimed that 'Zeta' had violated civil liberties. Council and the community became more polarised.

1980s

- * New town planning regulations and prosecutions on massage parlours drove more prostitutes onto the streets as sex workers in brothels did not get a sufficient percentage of customer payments and their earnings were also subject to taxation.
- * The special Delta police taskforce concluded in 1983 that there were problems in St Kilda of child prostitution, child pornography, drug abuse and movement between Kings Cross and St Kilda of youths under 16 who were ineligible for unemployment benefits.
- * Marcia Neave's enquiry into prostitution in 1984 led to the Prostitution Control Act 1986 which warned against loitering in public space, but had no impact on street prostitution in St Kilda.

1990s

- * The 1994 Prostitution Control Act increased fines for street sex workers relating to offences such as loitering and soliciting and new penalties and amended the 1986 Act by introducing charges for street sex workers working near churches, schools, kindergartens or anywhere where children frequent.
- * In 1994 the Prostitutes Collective of Victoria held a rally in response to the murder of two street sex workers in St Kilda in 1994. They argued that violent men were given a clear message by our criminal justice system that attacking men and women in St Kilda was a lesser crime than attacking others. Over 150 sex workers, Councillors and residents marched, held candles, blew whistles and assembled at Talbot Reserve

2000s

- * In 2001 the Port Phillip Action Group (PPAG) marched to demand that something been done about street sex work in St Kilda. A group of 50 residents supporting street sex workers' rights held a counter rally. It was called by QUEER, Queers United to Eradicate Economic Rationalism.
- * State government set up a bipartisan investigation into street sex work through the Dept of Justice – the Attorney General's Street Prostitution Advisory Group (AGSPAG). The group included residents, traders, police, local Councillors, MPs, reps from community and health agencies and one sex worker.
- * The group recommended tolerance zones but Council had to draw up a list of possible sites using strict criteria and was forced to nominate some areas where sex work had not previously existed. Some residents rallied against these sites and PPAG claimed that there was nowhere suitable in St Kilda for street sex workers and reiterated their initial demand that all sex workers be moved out. Recommendations were released at a time coinciding with a State election. The Labour government withdrew their support and AGSPAG fell apart.
- * A special court of the Melbourne Magistrates Court ('Tuesday Courts') was set up in October 2003 to hear cases against street sex workers as part of Inner South Community Health Services' Arrest Referral Program. The program increased the numbers of street sex workers who attended court and supported their access to health and community services including drug treatment programs.
- * *Street Walking Blues* was published in 2006, after interviews with 14 St Kilda street sex workers.
- * Council initiated a series of innovative projects in the streets and alleys of St Kilda during 2004-2008 that educated more than 2000 community members about the complexities of street sex work and drugs.
- * Council undertook a consultation process in direct response to the request of residents to have the opportunity to have their experiences and voices about living with street sex work heard. The 2010 report 'Living Next to Street Sex Work' is a narrative of these stories. The process involved a letter-drop to 780 residences asking for an expression of interest to be involved in the consultation and, of these, 90 responses were returned to Council with 20 people selected to be interviewed by an independent researcher commissioned by City of Port Phillip.
- * New laws have been introduced into Parliament to give Police the power to ban kerb-crawlers soliciting street sex workers and interfering with the liveability of the St Kilda community. These laws will operate on a trial basis and sunset on 1 January 2012 when they will be evaluated by Government. Evaluation of these laws will help to inform future law and order responses to street sex work. In the meantime, Council, Police and community agencies communicate regularly with each other and attend to all complaints as quickly as possible within their resource constraints.

What has been tried?

The following responses have been tried to address the issue of street sex work in St Kilda since the 1880s:

1. Legal bans
2. Council by-laws
3. Revised sanctions (e.g., long jail sentences, heavy fines)

4. Exit programs and strategies
5. Religious counselling and re-education campaigns
6. Police blitzes on street sex workers
7. Police blitzes on kerb crawlers
8. Undercover police operations
9. Traffic engineering (e.g., blocking streets, one way streets, banning u-turns)
10. Abuse from passing traffic (e.g., verbal, eggs, bottles, rocks, rubbish)
11. Intensive Lobbying
12. Street protests
13. Reform of the Magistrates Court
14. Education around safety implication for Street Sex Workers

What do we do now?

Council's approach to street sex work

Like most other organizations who work closely around the issue of street sex work, Council does not condone its operation on the streets of St Kilda. Street sex work is an illegal activity, the control of which lies with the State Government and Victoria Police. The priority of Council is to focus on a harm minimization approach, taking appropriate action to try and enhance perceptions of community satisfaction and safety within streets.

Harm minimisation entails a range of strategies relating to supply reduction, demand reduction and harm reduction. In the context of street prostitution, harm minimisation strategies focus on the individuals and communities involved, and the social, cultural and physical environment.

(Attorney-General's Street Prostitution Advisory Group Final Report, 2002)

As part of this harm minimization focus, a strong emphasis will be on;

- i) Strengthening community knowledge through information and support. The CoPP will increase residents' information and clarity around Council's role in relation to State Government's role in street sex work.
- ii) Developing a communication plan amongst key stakeholders including resident and street sex work representatives.
- iii) Continuing to work with local community groups, the Police and State Government to stop child street sex work.
- iv) Continue to encourage, support and explore further diversion options for street sex work such as the Tuesday Courts.
- v) Advocate on behalf of street sex workers for funding to support further programs including exit programs and activities that ease street sex work's dependency to solicit.
- vi) Responding to amenity issues for residents and visitors. This involves reviewing possible upgrades to Councils existing response to reduce or clean up sex-related litter; syringe disposal bins; lighting, public toilets, noise (including traffic) and safety strategies (including a focus on drugs, negative presence of clients/pimps and uninvited propositions or gazes from clients) to increase better liveability. Amenity response will be developed by Council. Noise and safety strategies will be developed with resident input.

Local and State Government Roles

It is vital that Council continues to work on this topic in partnership with State Government, legal, Policing and welfare agencies. The topic is complex and requires co-operation from a number of organisations/Government departments. Even though street sex work has been illegal for more than 100 years, it continues to operate on our streets and we need to reduce as much harm to residents and street sex workers as possible.

Who do I contact about my concerns?

Issue	Contact
1. Concern about current street sex work or related criminal activity	Call Police on 000
2. Complaint about rubbish or cleaning	Call CoPP Waste Management via ASSIST on 9209 6777
3. Concern about street sex work as an on-going issue	Call CoPP Health & Wellbeing via ASSIST on 9209 6777
4. Complaint about illegal brothel	Call Consumer Affairs on 1300 558 181
5. Help for street sex workers to access exit programs and other referral services	Call CoPP Health & Wellbeing via ASSIST ON 9209 6777

Where can I get more information?

- Longmire, A. *The Show Goes On-The History of St. Kilda* .Vol. 3 1930-1983. Hudson, Melbourne, 1989.
- Rowe, J. *Streetwalking Blues. Sex work, St Kilda and the Street*. RMIT, 2006.
- Attorney-General's Street Prostitution Advisory Group Final Report, 2002
- CoPP. (DVD) *Sex & Drugs Historical Tour – Hit the Road – Habits of the Heart*, 2010
- Rowe, J. *Living Next to Street Sex Work*, RMIT, 2010