

NSW Sex Workers Outreach Project

Strategic Plan 2013-2016

swop

Sex Workers Outreach Project

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Introduction

SWOP is Australia's largest and longest established community based sex worker organisation focused on HIV, STI and Hepatitis C prevention, education and health promotion for sex workers in NSW. A key element in the success of SWOP's work is the building of strategic, collaborative and multidisciplinary working relationships with sex workers, other key health, government and non-government organisations, and advocating for an equitable and holistic approach to services provided to sex workers.

There is a lot for us to be proud of in NSW with no recorded case of HIV transmission from sex worker to client, and lower rates of STIs among female sex workers compared to women in the non sex working population. This success has been made possible, in large part, through the decriminalisation of the NSW sex industry, allowing sex workers access to vital services and support, and enabling SWOP to access the majority of sex services premises throughout NSW. Moves to introduce new models of regulation which may put at risk achievements to date will undermine SWOP's ability to play a role in meeting the targets of the *NSW HIV Strategy 2012 - 2015*.

SWOP's Strategic Plan 2013-2016 will provide a broad framework to carry us forward over the next three years, with a key achievement during this plan being the transition of SWOP to an autonomous sex worker governed organisation by July 2014.

SWOP was established over 21 years ago after the *Australia Prostitutes Collective* ceased operation. The newly established sex worker organisation was then auspiced by ACON. This was intended to be a temporary, short term arrangement and throughout the years, there has been a concerted effort to launch SWOP as an autonomous sex worker organisation. Until now a range of factors prevented SWOP becoming a totally independent organisation.

SWOP strongly believes in self-determination and community led **HIV** responses, and is excited to be moving into this new era and forming its own governance structures. This move **will** enable us to strengthen our role as a key player in sex worker policy and advocacy to ensure sex worker rights and voices are central in all decisions impacting us.

SWOP will continue to promote a legal framework that **supports sex worker health and safety**. While SWOP believes the **current regulatory framework** could be improved to provide a more **consistent approach** that supports a healthier and safer NSW sex industry, we are adamant that any changes to the current system must be made with the health and safety of sex workers as central. To this end we will continue to engage with government at both a state and local level, and with community and stakeholders to ensure decriminalisation is sustained and improved.

A shift in the way sex workers are choosing their place of work - with an increase in home-based sex work - has seen SWOP develop new outreach mechanisms, utilising a range of online and social media forums. SWOP will continue to develop our online presence throughout the life of this plan, and investigate new technologies that can be utilised to improve our services and communication with sex workers. SWOP's capacity to respond to challenges and deliver innovative and effective programs and services has been essential to our success to date. We will continue to meet these challenges and shifts in practice by ensuring our outreach team is equipped with the skills and resources to deliver effective peer education and support, as well as diversify our services where required.

SWOP is accountable to our communities and is committed to increasing our community **engagement** and consultation over the course of this plan. The principles that underpin community **development** are core to our work and we recognise the value of genuine community participation in all our activities.

SWOP works toward awareness-raising to reduce the stigma and discrimination experienced by sex workers through the provision of education and training to students, health organisations and other services, including the NSW Police. SWOP employs a team of bilingual peer educators to connect with culturally and linguistically diverse sex workers. The outreach team is made up of male, trans*, Aboriginal and female outreach workers. This targeted approach allows SWOP to provide culturally appropriate services, backed up by a range of peer developed resources. SWOP is committed to maintaining our connection with our communities, and continuously evaluating our services to meet the needs of the changing NSW sex industry landscape.

SWOP looks forward to continuing to play a key role in ensuring that the rights and health of sex workers are upheld and maintained, and to enabling NSW to continue to deliver a world leading response to HIV and STIs.

Our Mission

SWOP's mission is to improve the health of all sex workers in NSW through innovative, holistic and effective approaches to sexual health, and to improve the protection of their human rights.

Our Values

At SWOP we value and respect:

- Self-determination for sex workers
- Workplace rights and the recognition of sex work as work
- The diversity of the sex industry and its workforce
- Holistic approaches to health and wellbeing

Ottawa Charter

Health Promotion

Health promotion is the process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve, their health. To reach a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing, an individual or group must be able to identify and to realise aspirations, to satisfy needs, and to change or cope with the environment. Health is, therefore, seen as a resource for everyday life, not the objective of living. Health is a positive concept emphasising social and personal resources, as well as physical capacities. Therefore, health promotion is not just the responsibility of the health sector, but goes beyond healthy lifestyles to wellbeing.

Prerequisites for Health

The fundamental conditions and resources for health are:

- Peace
- Shelter
- Education
- Food
- Income
- A stable eco-system
- Sustainable resources
- Social justice
- Equity

Improvement in health requires a secure foundation in these basic prerequisites.

Advocacy

Good health is a major resource for social, economic and personal development and an important dimension of quality of life. Political, economic, social, cultural, environmental, behavioural and biological factors can all favour health or be harmful to it. Health promotion action aims at making these conditions favourable through advocacy for health.

Our Goals

Over the life of this strategic plan SWOP will focus on achieving five key goals:

Goal 1

Maintain low rates of HIV and STI transmissions in the NSW sex industry, and work with our partners towards the elimination of HIV transmission altogether.

Goal 2

Recognise the diversity of the sex industry and respond to the needs of NSW sex workers, ensuring equity of access for all sex workers to health, safety and wellbeing.

Goal 3

Improve SWOP's capacity to meet the needs of sex workers from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.

Goal 4

Work to reduce barriers and discrimination impeding sex worker access to health, safety and wellbeing.

Goal 5

Establish SWOP as a sustainable, autonomous sex worker-led health organisation that is recognised as a key source of support and advocacy for sex workers, and that has the people, resources and culture necessary to deliver best practice services.

Goal 1

Maintain low rates of HIV and STI transmissions in the NSW sex industry, and work with our partners towards the elimination of HIV transmission altogether.

To achieve this goal we will:

- Support the NSW sex industry's high rates of voluntary HIV, hepatitis C and STI testing.
- Work to maintain the current high rates of condom use in the NSW sex industry.
- Increase sex worker information on hepatitis C issues specifically relating to transmission.
- Increase knowledge and skills of sex workers to further enable them to make informed decisions around sexual health.

"I made money I'd never imagined and I wore velvet dresses and shone in lamplight. I walked tall in crowds, knowing myself to be desired. I told people I was a prostitute, and smiled as I said it, and dared them to turn their gaze... The smile that I give when I talk about it now is, I can feel, nostalgic, provocative."

Kate Holden, *In My Skin*.

"Street based sex workers are human beings - they deserve the rights and protections that we all enjoy. It will not help them if we continue to perceive them as victims or desperate. If we infantilise them and undermine the perception of their agency - we perpetuate the idea that they are different to the broader community."

Christian Vega,
sex worker,
Community Development
Worker, Activist

SELF DETERMINATION FOR SEX WORKERS

'I miss the moment when you walk into a hotel, and get that feeling of, "I'm about to do a job and I'm about to do it well". My experiences of the business - let's not mince words here - were very lucky. And I look at where I am now and I'm very happy with it.'

Dr Brooke Magnanti,
aka Belle de Jour,
sex worker, novelist

Sex worker voices and health should be all that really matter in these debates, as it is our lives that are affected while others simply theorise from the sidelines.

Elena Jeffreys,
Australian sex worker, Activist
as quoted in ABC's *The Drum*, 2011.

Goal 2

Recognise the diversity of the sex industry and respond to the needs of NSW sex workers, ensuring equity of access for all sex workers to health, safety and wellbeing.

To achieve this goal we will:

- Review our services to ensure they properly reflect the diversity of the NSW sex industry and the needs of its workers.
- Make sure our services reflect and respond to the specific needs of all marginalised sex workers, including those marginalised by their: gender identity; racial background (including Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander identity); health status (including mental health); use of alcohol and/or other drugs; place of work; regional location; or lack of experience in the industry.
- Respond to shifts in sex industry practice such as increases in the proportion of sex workers who work privately, and the use of new communication technologies.
- Encourage, engage in, and utilise research that benefits our communities.

"Today, it's sex workers they want to ban from their motels, but who will it be next week? Gay Men? Aboriginal people? Are we going back to the days when it was okay to discriminate against anyone who looks different or acts differently?"

Nikki Cox,
Sex worker as quoted in
'When Sex Is Your Day Job',
The Australian Women's Weekly, March 2013

THE DIVERSITY OF THE SEX INDUSTRY AND ITS WORKFORCE

"The stereotype of sex workers, that they are all drug addicted, abused, powerless women, pimped out by dangerous men to clients (probably married men) who want weird and kinky sex, is, as most stereotypes are, based on ignorance and fear."

Jane Gilmore,
Journalist, *The King's Tribune*

Goal 3

Improve SWOP's capacity to meet the needs of sex workers from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.

To achieve this goal we will:

- Improve and expand our range of culturally appropriate resources and actively seek funding to build our peer-education capacities.
- Maintain our one-on-one services for people from CALD backgrounds, and actively seek funding for more culturally-specific outreach.
- Monitor shifts in migration and the cultural or linguistic composition of the NSW sex industry workforce.

"Sex work is not the only occupation in my life. I was an international student, bartender, child-care worker, nanny, waitress, hotel receptionist, make-up artist and a shoe-seller. It's the same for every different job. There are many reasons why someone might do a job, many reasons why someone might not. Why then do people have to stigmatize or stereotype sex workers?"

Anonymous,
NSW migrant sex worker

WORKPLACE RIGHTS & RECOGNITION OF SEX WORK AS WORK

"Tell people that we're not freaks! Tell them we're not on drugs, we're not being abused. Anyone they know could be doing this job. Tell them we're just people like them."

Elizabeth,
sex worker, *Daily Planet*

"We're not invisible people. We are human beings, and if we're being attacked, we have the right also to the same protection as anyone else. I must say when the law changed, it did turn, it did make it even easier because you could just ring the police and just say, you know, and they'd be up there like a shot."

Josie,
NZ private worker

Goal 4

Work to reduce barriers and discrimination impeding sex worker access to health, safety and wellbeing.

To achieve this goal we will:

- Provide a sex worker-positive voice in the media.
- Develop an advocacy and policy plan that reflects sex worker priorities and that promotes a supportive legal framework, decriminalisation, and workplace rights for sex workers.
- Strengthen and deliver our stakeholder training and awareness program.

I have a number of friends and acquaintances who have either been or currently are sex workers. No doubt I know greater numbers of women still who may one day become sex workers. And I'm tired of seeing their lives denigrated because of how they choose to make money – as if taking off your clothes for a pre-arranged fee is somehow less honourable than working for a mining company or a tabloid magazine.

Clementine Ford,
Debunking The Myths Of Sex Work,
Daily Life, April 2013

“Is there still a ragged edge to the NSW sex industry? Of course, but the size of that ragged edge is much smaller than anywhere else,”

Professor Basil Donovan,
The Kirby Institute, University of New South Wales

HOLISTIC APPROACHES TO HEALTH AND WELLBEING

“Very low STI (sexually transmitted infection) prevalence has been maintained among sex workers in New Zealand and NSW, and HIV transmission within the context of sex work is understood to be extremely low or non-existent,”

John Godwin,
Sex Work and the Law (2012)
United Nations Development Program
Asia-Pacific Regional Centre

“Sex workers in NSW have been very successful at protecting their own and their clients health, as evidenced by the extremely low prevalence of HIV and STIs among sex workers. Peer education and outreach by the Sex Worker Outreach Project (SWOP) based at ACON, have played a central role in achieving these health outcomes.”

NSW Health,
NSW HIV Strategy 2012–2015: A New Era

Goal 5

Establish SWOP as a sustainable, autonomous sex worker-led health organisation that is recognised as a key source of support and advocacy for sex workers and that has the people, resources and culture necessary to deliver best practice services.

To achieve this goal we will:

- Design and establish a sound governance structure.
- Build a membership base for the organisation.
- Explore funding and fundraising opportunities.
- Conduct a detailed analysis of current and required resources and finances, with a view to planning for our independent future.
- Develop policies and procedures for our autonomous organisation.

"We currently have a decriminalised sex industry in NSW that has proven to be very successful in terms of both HIV prevention and ensuring a safe and healthy work place for sex workers."

John Godwin,
Human rights lawyer, United Nations

Notes





swop

www.swop.org.au