

# Improved working relationships between a sex worker organisation and the police in order to increase the effectiveness of HIV prevention strategies for street-based sex workers

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## Overview:

Sydney has a legally-defined street-based sex work area that SWOP regularly outreaches. Recent collaborative approaches between SWOP and the local police has dramatically improved the effectiveness of HIV prevention strategies and empowered sex workers to make informed decisions about health and safety.

## Positive changes:

SWOP conducted a number of education sessions for police in that area and three officers volunteered to act as Police Sex Worker Liaison Officers (PSWLOs).

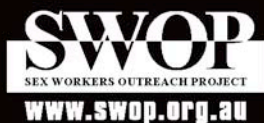
The level of intimidation and conflict between police and the sex workers has dramatically decreased and the active support from the PSWLOs to the workers has increased communication and initiated positive policing.

This allows workers to operate in an environment where HIV prevention strategies can be employed without fear or persecution. The empowerment of the sex workers has increased peer-based education on the street with many now confident to call the police and assert their rights if required.

SWOP has a dedicated mobile phone number for workers that provides a static contact point. This conduit allows the workers to:

- Report incidents at any hour
  - Use SMS as a means of communication
- SWOP can then:
- Contact workers outside office hours
  - Contact the police and other relevant organisations immediately
  - Maintain continuity of information exchange

The role of police in regards to street-based sex workers is paramount for HIV prevention strategies to be implemented. Policy directives from the police should optimally come from the top down to assure a consistent and informed approach. Regular education sessions for the police and specifically appointed Police Sex Work Liaison Officers can dramatically improve the working environment for this vulnerable population.



Rachel Wotton thanks her colleague Wendy Parsons, and all the wonderful women who work along Canterbury Road

