



# SWOp

SEX WORKERS OUTREACH PROJECT

ANNUAL REPORT 2014-2015



# SWOP COMMITTEE PRESIDENT'S REPORT

The Sex Workers Outreach Project (SWOP) has been working to improve the health, safety and human rights of sex workers in NSW for more than 25 years. On the first of July this year, SWOP celebrated its first year as an independent, fully incorporated sex worker-led organisation, and I would like to pay tribute to our immediate past Chief Executive Officer Kylie Tattersall, the SWOP Transition Committee, SWOP employees, and all those who worked to achieve this milestone.

Today, SWOP is led by a Committee, which is soon to be a member-elected Committee. The Committee is responsible for strategy, financial oversight, policy development and governance, and is comprised of current and former sex workers who provide their time and expertise on a voluntary basis. With my passion for sex worker health, safety and human rights, I was one of SWOP's earliest members, joining the Committee in March 2015.

The Committee looks forward to your ongoing membership and participation as we pursue SWOP's strategic objectives and continue to grow our membership base.



Dominique Diaz

I know why the caged bird sings.

Maya Angelou



Cameron Cox

## CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT

My involvement with sex work began whilst I was still at high school as a street-based worker in Sydney working on the Wall strip of Darlinghurst Road. Since then I have worked in all states of Australia, and many other countries, across a range of sex work settings and differing legal frameworks. I have a strong commitment to SWOP's original values of peer education, community empowerment and optimum sex worker health, through the removal of stigma and discrimination, and the achievement of sex workers' human rights.

SWOP has a proud history that stretches back to the recognised beginning of modern sex worker empowerment, thirty years ago. I am proud to be the ninth person to head up this amazing organisation, taking up the reins halfway through 2015 from outgoing Chief Executive Officer, Kylie Tattersall.

Since its inception, SWOP has achieved many remarkable things, and this last year - operating entirely as an autonomous, sex worker-led organisation - has been no exception. SWOP's achievements, which are detailed on the subsequent pages of this report, would not have been possible without the extraordinary efforts of SWOP staff, and the many others who volunteered time and energy in both frontline, management and governance capacities. These achievements directly hinge upon a whole of government approach, the health sector, and the continued support of SWOP's many partners and stakeholders.

(NEARLY) **1,000,000**  
PEOPLE REACHED ON SOCIAL MEDIA

**447**  
SEX SERVICES  
PREMISES VISITED

**7** MAJOR  
EVENTS



**57,576**

VISITS TO RURAL &  
REGIONAL AREAS

**44**

**19,564**  
PRINTED RESOURCES

**5,212**  
OCCASIONS OF  
SERVICE TO  
SEX WORKERS

UNIQUE  
WEBSITE  
VISITORS

**181,759**  
SAFE SEX ITEMS  
DISTRIBUTED



ORGANISATIONS TRAINED **52**

**15** SMALL GROUP WORKSHOPS  
ATTENDED BY

**19** NEW  
RESOURCES

**157**  
SEX WORKERS

# KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

SWOP's primary achievement in 2015 was operating as an independent sex worker-led organisation. Managing this transition required significant time and resources, yet despite this, SWOP achieved an increase in service provision to NSW sex workers.

"Considering we've had tight staffing, the increase in outreach services is a real achievement," explained Outreach and Community Services Manager, Cheryl.

SWOP distributed 134,961 condoms (up 31.29% on last year), gave out 46,798 other safe sex materials and 3,557 sterile units of injecting equipment. SWOP visited 447 sex services premises (up 12.59% on last year) and attended 44 regional areas.

SWOP distributed 19,564 educational and support materials (up 5.90%), aided by us producing 19 new SWOP resources, ranging from an Aboriginal brochure, to a rapid turn-around Online Activism & Self Care flyer, to the first two SWOPspots video resources. The SWOP website also continues to be popular, attracting 57,576 unique visitors, up 17.89% on last year. We support these resources via social media.



SWOP ran 15 workshops, which were attended by 157 sex workers, and involved plenty of peer-to-peer sharing. SWOP also delivered 17 presentations, and trained 52 organisations, using 30 different training courses that covered useful information on SWOP, the NSW sex industry, and challenged stigma and discrimination against sex workers.

The community building aspect of SWOP's work included us providing numerous opportunities for sex workers to come together, including seven major events, attended by 225 people. Prior to our annual Hookers & Strippers Ball themed 'Whorewood', we hosted a forum on the representation of sex workers in film, TV and the media, attended by 55 people. SWOP co-hosted an event for the International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers, and held stalls at Sydney Yabun Festival and Sydney Mardi Gras Fair Day. These stalls, manned by SWOP staff and volunteers, allowed us to interact with sex workers, as well as advocate to the general public on behalf of our communities. SWOP's 59 volunteers contributed 212 hours of work, 52.52% more than last year.

Quarterly distribution of The Professional magazine continued. It is produced by an Editorial Committee composed of SWOP

staff and community members. Participating in these meetings and developing writing capacity has paid off for one particular (five year) volunteer, who has subsequently gone on to have a story published in New York workers' magazine, Prose and Lore 2; self-published two print books, and recently added radio experience on Radio Jailbreak and 2SER to her resume. She explains: "Living and surviving in a world of sex work is frowned upon and frequently despised by the general public, and that is those on the other side of the fence. My choice for the arts, and its related fields, has had a more positive and less adverse reaction from the general public than my choice to be a sex worker. SWOP has given me the leverage and the confidence to establish my dreams while being a sex worker."

## POLICY

With a dedicated part-time Policy, Media and Communications position, SWOP is now better able to advocate for sex worker health. We made six submissions to government, media, decision-makers and regulatory authorities; sat on three advisory committees; and represented NSW sex workers on three research ethics committees and projects.

## SOCIAL MEDIA

SWOP's outreach to sex workers across the state, including resource distribution and promotion, was improved by our vibrant social media accounts, where we made 3,014 posts, reaching almost a million (969,908) people. Interactivity with those following our social media accounts was also high (61,847), with many people engaging with our content by liking, sharing, retweeting and commenting on it - not bad when you consider that despite twenty years of decriminalisation, sex work still remains a stigmatised profession in NSW.

## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

SWOP's independence on 1 July 2014 was quickly accompanied by press releases, launch events for sex workers (50 attendees) and organisational partners (80 attendees). Behind the scenes, our transition involved establishing, mentoring and providing governance training for SWOP Committee Members, running Committee meetings, developing SWOP policies, rebadging everything from staff emails to our web presence, building a membership base, and taking up our own positions on key advisory committees.



# CULTURALLY & LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE SEX WORKERS

SWOP specifically targets culturally and linguistically diverse sex workers working in NSW, with the largest numbers coming from Thai, Chinese or Korean backgrounds. Last year, SWOP saw 2,331 sex industry workers who were culturally and linguistically diverse, making up 44.7% of sex industry workers we saw overall. We also visited 314 sex services premises (SSPs) where English was not the predominant language spoken. This included 6 priority SSPs where problems had been reported for a variety of reasons, including the presence of new workers who might benefit from our services. Emerging groups of culturally and linguistically diverse sex workers included those from Pacific Island nations, Spanish, Vietnamese and Japanese-speaking sex workers, but numbers in each of these individual groups were still too low to support a project officer.

## THAI PROJECT



Across the last year, SWOP's Thai project saw 748 Thai sex workers, up 23.6% on last year. The biggest shift in this population of migrant sex workers was an increase in new and younger sex workers, including new transgender sex workers coming to Australia on student and dependant visas. While many had not done sex work in Thailand, they chose this option in NSW for the fiscal advantages, and because "parlour staff make like a family, so they feel comfortable to work here," Thai Outreach Officer, Jum explains. SWOP Thai Project team members report that idea of working as a family group is also reflected in the way groups of four to five Thai workers support each other through moves between metro parlours and interstate, to look for increased work opportunities in locations including Melbourne, Canberra and Adelaide.

With the influx of new-to-the-industry workers, Jum said: "We decided to do Sex Work 101 workshops in parlours." "It's the best way to reach them – better than a brochure," Birdie added; though they both eagerly await the completion of SWOP's Safe At Work Thai resource. The biggest barrier to running these workplace sexual health initiatives can be explaining their value for Thai sex workers to an owner who might be from a different cultural background, like Chinese. SWOP uses a partnership approach with sexual health clinics to reinforce our respective roles and areas of expertise. Sometimes, Jum explains, Thai sex workers "are only listening about STIs" so we refer those sex workers to their local sexual health clinic; but we make sure to remind them "in the future, if you get trouble with something, you can come to SWOP". According to Thai Outreach Officer, Birdie, our Thai Project's best achievement in 2014-15 was that "we worked as a team." With three part-time /casual Thai-speaking officers, this includes balancing their work days so SWOP is covered by a Thai-speaking Outreach Officer most days of the week, as well as having "lots of discussion about what we will do," explains Jum.

## CHINESE PROJECT

SWOP Chinese Project Officer, Mon, ranks hosting The Jade Flower Workshop for Chinese sex workers at our building in Surry Hills among her key achievements for 2014-15. Mon pointed out that getting 5 Chinese sex workers to attend is a culturally significant achievement because in China, you can be arrested simply for being "in a group together to have a conversation about sex work." Mon's workshops include some simple English lessons, but she's quick to point out that Chinese sex workers are very adept at saying no to clients:

"Not really good English does not make them more vulnerable, it just leads to misunderstandings." By ensuring Chinese sex workers correctly employ common Australian terms for particular services, Mon ensures these sex workers are better able to avoid misunderstandings like client complaints that the "agreed service didn't happen".

Over the course of the year, SWOP provided 889 occasions of service to Chinese sex workers, an increase of 15.3% on last year. "Lots of people seeing me went to work in a regional area, fly-in, fly-out," Mon reported, resulting in an increase in the time spent explaining different state-based

legislation and decriminalisation. Working in partnership with sexual health clinic staff, Mon was also able to address persistent community rumours that circulated surrounding mouthwash being an effective measure against STIs: "I just use to wash client penis." While not discouraging peer-to-peer sharing of information, or discrediting the use of complementary Chinese medicine, Mon uses her partnerships and outreach to Chinese sex workers to reinforce the key message that: "At the end of the day, it's good you go to sexual health clinic."

"The more they see me, they build trust," says Mon. She is also very persistent, and this pays off when it comes to SWOP having access to Chinese-run and staffed sex service premises across NSW. "Basically I am Chinese," Mon explains, "I never give up, just go back again and again."

## KOREAN PROJECT

During the last year, SWOP has continued our search for a permanent part-time Korean Outreach Officer, recruiting in stages for most of the year. This position is traditionally hard to fill due to a number of issues that Korean sex workers face due to stigma in their own country. We were lucky enough to secure Jenny for a short contract during this time, and her work with Korean-speaking sex workers is certainly partially responsible for us seeing a 16.3% increase in the Korean sex workers we saw. By working in partnership with our peak body, Scarlet Alliance, we utilised a Korean-speaking sex worker advocate from the Migration Project to collaborate on Korean resources.



## TRANS PROJECT



SWOP's Trans Project saw 470 trans sex industry workers last year, an increase of 31.7%. Project Officer Chantell explains that one reason for this 30% rise is due to an increase in seeing more trans workers while on private outreach, with trans workers now representing 15.4% of the private sex workers SWOP saw overall. "The individual one-on-one thing with my community is where I excel, and where we excel," says Chantell. Much of Chantell's work is done face-to-face with individual members of her communities. Chantell says: "it's not always about sex work. It would be a range of things including: 'I don't have a place to stay'; 'I'm living under the Bridge'; 'They cut me off Centrelink'; to 'Work is slack, I'm not getting any jobs!'"

SWOP is only useful to this community if we address the multitude of contributing life issues stemming from both being transgender, as well as being a transgender sex worker. "Health promotion must be holistic," explains Chantell, who supplements

her one-on-one work with advocacy at events and making presentations, including presenting on a panel for ACON regarding HIV and trans sex workers. "This was very interesting, and informative for those in attendance, as we don't often hear the experiences of trans sex workers and the barriers to accessing HIV services in NSW," she said.

An emerging issue "is definitely with trans men, and their issues are very different from ours as trans women." Chantell will be addressing the needs of trans male sex workers using peer-run workshops, because "no one knows their health better than they do." Trans male sex workers anecdotally report difficulty negotiating the health sphere when their body anatomy doesn't match the gender they are presenting as. Being a sex worker adds an additional layer of complexity when advocating for appropriate health care. The key message is: "Don't ignore what you've got down there," says Chantell, and the way she intends to publicise it is by capacity building peer educators.

## ABORIGINAL &/OR TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PROJECT

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people who use sex for favours are particularly affected by stigma, both from mainstream health services they attempt to access, as well as by shame from their own community with respect to their sex work, leading to them being reluctant to disclose it even when they do access services. Subsections of this population, including sistergirls who do sex work, may in effect experience triple stigma, arising from them being Aboriginal, a sex worker and a sistergirl/transgender person.

As a result, much of SWOP's work in this area is event-based or done in partnerships with Aboriginal Medical Services (AMS) across the state. During this reporting period, Jo revisited the Northern Rivers region, building upon the strong relationships she had already established in Port Macquarie, Kempsey and Coffs Harbour. This also included running a well-attended workshop in Kempsey. Jo also visited Moree for the first time: "This was my first outreach to Moree and I heard a lot of voices about the sex working that occurs in the Moree community and nearby communities."

Jo's work involves a lot of yarning with community members at mainstream services, sliding in information about sex work where appropriate. Her manager Cheryl noted that as a result of this work: "We've started to see more of a response from the Aboriginal community." This is reflected in the 128 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander sex industry workers SWOP saw, an increase of 30.6% on last year. SWOP supplemented our outreach work with these communities using advocacy, including making a submission to NSW Health on the draft NSW Aboriginal Blood Borne Viruses and Sexually Transmissible Infections Framework 2015-2020.



## MALE PROJECT

Our Male Project spent the year consolidating upon the work of 2013-14 (which saw a 17.51% increase) and 2012-13 (which saw a 113.02% increase) in engagement with SWOP by male sex workers across NSW. Across the course of the last year, SWOP saw 806 male sex industry workers (a slight rise of 2.3%). At AIDS2014, our Male Project Officer Cam convened a consortium of male sex projects across the globe to better share information relevant to male sex workers.

The emerging issue for this group of sex workers was the consolidation of evidence on the efficacy of biomedical prevention for HIV transmission, especially pre-exposure

prophylaxis, or PrEP. "We just made sure that people knew that it existed; and provided the latest information so that they were able to make informed decisions," explains Cam. For many male sex workers, the PrEP question involves two choices, namely what they choose to do with it in their commercial lives, where barrier protection i.e. condoms have provided extremely effective protection against the transmission of all STIs, and what they do in their personal lives.

Engagement with this community remains a key challenge, with many male sex workers indicating that they prefer online, downloadable resources they can access anonymously, when or if the need arises,

in preference to face-to-face or other forms of outreach. "Don't call us, we'll call you," was their request Cam explains, "So that is what we did." These downloadable resources are supported by SWOPmale branded social media accounts, including a presence across the common hook-up sites that male sex workers frequent.

This year also saw the publication of The Hook Up Report: a study of male sex work in NSW and QLD; a research project headed by Associate Professor Garrett Prestage in partnership with SWOP. "The best piece of male research to come out of Australia, probably ever," says Cam.



## FEMALE PROJECT

This year SWOP interacted with 3,866 female sex workers, which made up 74.2% of the total sex workers we saw. The female outreach team continued focussed service provision to sex workers in all modes of work – including parlour-based workers, private workers, escorts, street-based sex workers, strippers, massage workers and sex workers at other sites, such as BDSM venues. Workshops were run on Private Work 101, Strategies to Address Discrimination in the Sex Industry and Money Matters for Sex Workers. All workshops were well attended, with sex workers eager to get together and share tips and tricks.

SWOP visited 447 sex services premises in the last year, an increase of 12.5% on last year. This included making priority visits to 25 premises, for a variety of reasons including the presence of new workers who would benefit from our services. We saw 559 new sex workers during this period.

SWOP also travelled all around NSW to visit sex workers of all genders, performing 44 visits to regional and rural areas, including Wagga Wagga, Albury, Taree, Port Macquarie, Kempsey, Coffs Harbour, Ballina, Lismore, Tweed Heads, Moree, the Illawarra, The Hunter, Gosford and Dubbo – with many of these areas being visited more than once.

In the course of their daily work, the female outreach team were also able to develop



the capacity of a student performing their placement at SWOP, and a casual staff member. These sex workers were given the opportunity to build their knowledge and experience 'on the job' at SWOP, with both eventually being successful at securing permanent part-time positions in the Female Project Team. "The skills and experience I developed working for SWOP as a casual, contributed significantly to my success in my new role as a SWOP Outreach Officer," said Tori.

## SWOP CONNECT & COUNSELLING



SWOP's state-wide mission is aided by our SWOP Connect service where sex industry workers from across NSW can get sexual health information, advice, tips and a friendly ear from a sex industry peer, five days a week. This SWOP service provided 1,354 occasions of service last year, using a combination of email, telephone calls and face-to-face interactions.

SWOP also operates an in-house counselling service, which provided 591 occasions of service last year. SWOP's Counsellor, Maggie, said she saw "more female sex workers in counselling describing intimate partner violence that is reflective of wider gender-related violence." Likewise, more sex workers over the year described problematic use of stimulant drugs. Drug issues in Australia are across communities and occupations. Counselling at SWOP includes supporting individual decision making for safety and well-being. "Most people generally seek counselling when dissatisfied, and for solutions to problems," explained Maggie. The key differences between SWOP's counselling services and other sorts of counselling are the peer-support components, and that the occupational decisions of sex workers are affirmed.

## MODES OF WORK

SWOP saw a total of 5,212 sex industry workers in NSW during the last year, an increase of 15.8% on the previous year. Those working in sex services premises, including massage parlours (with or without development approval), amounted to 3,147 of the sex industry workers we saw. In addition, SWOP saw 1,493 private workers, 53 strip club workers, and provided 472 occasions of service to street-based sex workers. The remaining sex workers we saw came from other work places such as BDSM venues.

SWOP continues to see a trend towards street-based sex workers changing their mode of work towards private work managed by phone, rather than spending extensive time on the street. Accordingly, in the last year we saw 27.3% more private workers, and 21.9% less street-based sex workers. Joanna, from our female outreach team, also reported a decrease in the number of "street-based sex workers who are injecting, or injecting consistently." This is backed up by SWOP seeing 230 sex workers who inject drugs, a drop of 14.5% on last year. We distributed 3,557 units of sterile injecting equipment, a decrease of 54.3% on

the number we distributed last year. At the same time we provided sex workers who inject drugs with enhanced avenues of service by working in partnership with organisations like NSW Users and AIDS Association (NUAA).

While adjusting to changes in the way NSW sex workers choose to perform their work, SWOP distributed approximately 270,000 safe sex items, an increase of 30% on last year. Approximately half of these safe sex items were distributed directly to sex workers either by SWOP staff on outreach, or to sex workers collecting their workers' packs from our Surry Hills office. This figure includes 134,961 free condoms, which is

31.3% increase on those distributed last year, and 46,798 other safe sex materials (including dams, gloves and lubricant), which is up 35.9% on last year. Bulk condom sales to sex services premises accounted for the other half.

Technological, and spatial changes in how NSW sex workers perform their work also meant changes in the way that SWOP outreach team members worked. "Now I check online for rural and regional sex workers, texting and emailing them before I visit," explains Joanna. This is supplemented by Facebook adverts, replacing our previous practice of simply placing advertisements in local papers.

## THANK YOU

The extraordinary results detailed in this report would not have been possible without the enthusiastic uptake of our services by NSW sex workers, sex industry businesses, SWOP staff and SWOP volunteers, particularly those on the inaugural SWOP Committee.

We would like to thank The Minister for Health, The Honourable Jillian Skinner MP, and our principle funder, the NSW Ministry of Health. We would also like to acknowledge all NSW Health Districts, Sexual Health Clinics and HARP Units, and NSW Police Local Area Commands we work closely with.

The organisations we work with are numerous , but we particularly recognise: ACON Health, ASHM, Aboriginal Medical Service, Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council, Bankstown Women's Health Centre, Bobby Goldsmith Foundation, City of Sydney, Darcy House, East Sydney Youth Hub, Family Planning Australia, First Step NSP, Glyde Health, The Gender Centre, HALC, Hepatitis NSW, Inner City Legal Centre, Kirketon Road Centre, Mudgin-Gal, Medically Supervised Injecting Centre (MSIC), NSW Users and AIDS Association (NUAA), Positive Life NSW, Respect QLD, S-Check, Scarlet Alliance, The Kirby Institute, Twenty 10, UNSW Centre for Social Research in Health (CSRH) , The Vixen Collective, Women and Girls' Emergency Centre (WAGEC) & The Wayside Chapel.

SWOP marks the passing of Alan Brotherton, 1963 to 2015. For more than 30 years, Alan made significant contributions to improving the lives of people affected by HIV. He worked closely with SWOP on policy issues, significantly on our advocacy to maintain a decriminalised legal framework for sex work in NSW.

## FINANCIALS

SWOP was audited by Grant Thornton Audit PTY LTD.  
Find a detailed report on the financial position of SWOP  
as at 30th June 2015 on our website:  
[www.swop.org.au/annualreport2015](http://www.swop.org.au/annualreport2015)

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