



www.respectqld.org.au

info@respectqld.org.au

ABN 47 552 535 661

Certificate of Incorporation IA37574

23rd February 2017

The Hon. Jenny Mikakos MLC

By Email jenny.mikakos@parliament.vic.gov.au

The Hon. Daniel Andrews

By Email daniel.andrews@parliament.vic.gov.au

Media release 16th December 2016, Funding of \$300,000 to Project Respect for outreach to support sex workers in Victoria

<http://www.premier.vic.gov.au/supporting-sex-workers-at-risk-of-violence/>

Dear Ministers

Respect Inc is a peer based sex workers' organisation incorporated in Queensland. We have been funded by Queensland Health to provide peer education services to sex workers for almost 8 years. Respect Inc has been delivering information, education, advocacy and support services to sex workers from offices across Queensland in Cairns, Townsville, Brisbane and the Gold Coast. We have also provided a Career Development (exit) program to sex workers in Queensland since 2014.

We have a comprehensive and direct understanding of the stigma that impacts on sex workers and we are very concerned that your Government is funding *Project Respect* to do domestic violence support for sex workers in Victoria.

We agree that this is necessary work for sex workers as identified by the Royal Commission into Family Violence but it must be done in a manner that does not further harm the sex workers it seeks to help.

Project Respect is not an organisation that advocates for or supports sex workers unconditionally. They do not have as their core mission to protect the rights of sex workers to safe working conditions. Project Respect is an abolitionist organisation. They have as their core philosophy that sex work is not work, that sex work is rape and that sex workers who do not identify as victims of sexual assault are suffering from a form of 'false consciousness'.

Brisbane

28 Mein Street
Spring Hill Q 4000

Townsville

118a Charters Towers Road
Hermit Park Q 4812

Cairns

7/24 Florence Street
Cairns City Q 4870

Gold Coast

4 Bay Street
Southport Qld 4215

This rhetoric is very harmful to sex workers who are working toward healing themselves of the social stigma they have experienced.

Project Respect does not “deeply respect the views and experiences of others” as they state on their website. Members of our organisation (who are all sex workers) have been stigmatised and traumatised through contact with them and via the disrespectful rhetoric that they produce.

Our members, who work to empower sex workers, raise our self-esteem and fight for our right to safe and equitable working conditions, refer to *Project Respect* as Project (Dis)respect. That is a gauge of how unpopular this organisation is amongst sex workers.

It is very difficult to work with sex workers on issues of domestic violence when the lines around what is, and what is not, violence, are blurred in the way they are with prohibitionist organisations, like Project Respect, who view prostitution itself as violence. We predict that this funding will be largely spent to continue the real work of Project Respect, which is to convince sex workers that their work is a type of violence being inflicted upon them by their male clients.

Sex workers who experience violence from partners but do not wish to exit sex work immediately will not get the judgement-free advocacy and support that they need and deserve.

Many sex workers who experience domestic violence are told by their violent partners that the violence is their own fault and that it is sex work that is the problem. They hear this also from workers at many community services agencies, and in particular at domestic violence shelters. They do not need to hear this from services that are specifically funded to help them!

By funding this organisation the Andrews Government is certainly NOT “*ensuring that sex workers and victims of trafficking get the help they need without fear of stigma or discrimination...*” as Minister Mikakos has said.

Any sex worker who does not agree with the core philosophy of Project Respect experiences direct contempt and anti-prostitution stigma that is no different to that which we receive from other members of the community who have moral objections to sex work.

We do not understand how a Government which oversees a legal framework for sex work licensing can justify funding an organisation that espouses the prohibition of sex work.

This also goes against the health promotion principles of the Ottawa Charter (of which Australia is a signatory) which calls for key stakeholders to be actively engaged in the



Brisbane

28 Mein Street
Spring Hill Q 4000

Townsville

118a Charters Towers Road
Hermit Park Q 4812

Cairns

7/24 Florence Street
Cairns City Q 4870

Gold Coast

4 Bay Street
Southport Qld 4215

development of any health program designed for them. We would like to know if leaders of the sex worker community in Victoria were consulted prior to the award of this funding grant. We are aware of two sex worker organisations in Victoria. One is a peer based organisation (Vixen) and the other is not (RhED) but we believe that neither of these organisations would have approved of this grant to Project Respect and for sound reasons. If RhED has approved this grant it is indicative of the failings of non-peer based health promotion programs when it comes to sex workers health and safety initiatives.

We would like the Andrews government to seriously re-consider this grant and consider the emotional harm contact with Project Respect will cause the sex workers that you seek to help with domestic violence services support. It is important to properly consult with and engage with legitimate community based organisations, such as Vixen, when awarding grants such as these.

Yours sincerely

Candi Forrest
For the Management Committee, Respect Inc

Phone 0421569232
Email candi@respectqld.org.au

PO Box 2470 New Farm Qld 4005

Brisbane
28 Mein Street
Spring Hill Q 4000

Townsville
118a Charters Towers Road
Hermit Park Q 4812

Cairns
7/24 Florence Street
Cairns City Q 4870

Gold Coast
4 Bay Street
Southport Qld 4215