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Program helping Melbourne sex workers exit the industry is a finalist in national community sector awards

A Melbourne-based program that helps sex workers explore work and training options, outside the sex industry is a finalist in the 2014 HESTA Community Sector Awards.

The 'Pathways to Exit' program is run by Inner South Community Health. It provides support and case management to individuals working in the sex industry. The program aims to address the issues that led them into sex work and the factors that prevent them leaving. Participants receive ongoing mentoring and support to seek and maintain employment outside the sex industry.

The service, which helped more than 60 (mostly female) sex workers last year, is one of five finalists in the Organisation category.

Inner South Community Health General Manager, Sue White, said the program had helped sex workers ranging in age from 25 to 44, for the past four years.

"The Pathways to Exit program provides a case management response to support sex workers to leave the sex industry. This unique 'wrap-around' model is driven by needs identified by the clients themselves," she said.

"A team of three social workers engage with clients to build trust and then tackle issues like housing, mental health, family relationships and managing debt. We then look at employment, and begin work on skills analysis, resume writing and interview techniques, before providing ongoing mentoring and support to find a job or engage in training.

"One client, started sex work at 17 and had been in the industry for more than ten years. Now she has accessed employment support, counselling, dental and optical care and joined a local gym. She is genuinely amazed at these achievements and is now studying to be a beautician."

Sue White and the other interstate finalists will be flown to Brisbane to attend the awards dinner, where the winners will be announced during the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) National Conference on Wednesday 11 June 2014.

A \$30,000 prize pool will be shared among the winners, courtesy of long-term HESTA awards supporter ME Bank. The Unsung Hero and Social Impact Award winners will each receive a \$5,000 ME Bank *EveryDay* Transaction Account and a \$5,000 education grant. The Organisation Award winner will receive a \$10,000 development grant.

The HESTA Community Sector Awards are presented in partnership with ACOSS the peak body for community services in Australia, as part of their commitment to building a strong, sustainable community sector supporting the needs of people affected by poverty, disadvantage and inequality.

HESTA is the leading super fund for health and community services, with more than 770,000 members and \$27 billion in assets. More people in health and community services choose HESTA for their super.

Visit hestaawards.com.au for tickets for the awards dinner or to learn more about the awards.

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