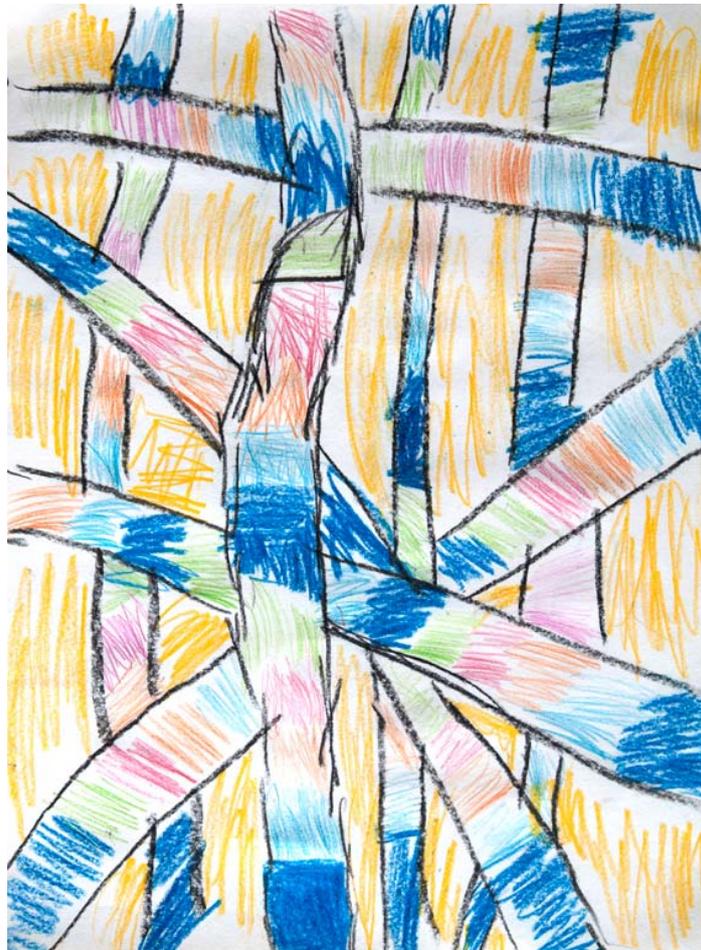




**RICHMOND RESIDENTS' PANEL PROJECT**  
**August - December 2011**  
**EVIDENCE AND RECOMMENDATIONS**



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## **INTRODUCTION**

This project was initiated by the Richmond Estate Action Group and funded by the Neighbourhood Justice Centre. It had three main purposes. Firstly, to understand the impact of the illegal drug trade from the perspective of people on or around the Richmond estate. Secondly, to provide an opportunity for these residents to develop their own solutions, and thirdly, for all of us involved to learn a different way of coming together to solve problems and help each other.

In July two project staff were engaged, who from August to the end of October spoke with as many groups and individuals as they could arrange meetings with. More than 100 people who lived or worked in the area were contacted. Due to the constraints of time not all groups could be contacted.

At the end of October two panels of ten residents were recruited. Each met separately for 2½ hours a week for three weeks. They were supported by the facilitator and project worker, and an independent chairperson was appointed to each panel. In the first week the panels considered the brief of evidence and had the opportunity to request further information from relevant experts in the second week. In the third week the panels developed recommendations. The two panels then came together to combine and refine their recommendations.

The principles of the project are reflected in the structure of this report. The project focused on the experience of the people who live with the issue. The problem was defined by the evidence they provided and the recommendations arose from their deliberations. Hence only the recorded evidence (edited to avoid identification of individuals) and the recommendations of the panels are presented here. Additional information about this project and the model on which it is based may be found in the related documents listed on page 19

## EVIDENCE

*From the beginning of August until the first week in November testimony of the impact of the illegal drug trade was gathered from people who lived on and around the estate.*

*Many residents were fearful about talking and being identified. For that reason the evidence from different groups has been mixed together. This testimony is compiled from notes taken during meetings and other conversations, and is presented here without interpretation. It was summarised for presentation to the panel members.*

Interpreter? Interpreter?

I want to call my son. Can I call my son? I can't speak English. I can't speak ...

Don't worry, she'll get her husband, he speaks English, he can interpret.

I'm very worried.

People who are selling poison are there ...

Every day there are more people ...

Why don't the police come and get them?

I know the one man's name ... but I never spoke to the Police or Housing

I'm scared.

Don't tell Police or Housing my name.

Why do people have the keys to the laundries?

That then some of them come and take drugs there?

Some people say they call 000 but then by the time the Police come, they've gone.

People are taking poison inside the flat.

Syringes are left on the ground. Maybe the kids will pick them up and play.

It's dangerous.

The man knows the camera, so he avoids it.

They can hide, they can go away from the camera.

The first floor corner step would be a good place to put another one.

I used to lock up securely less in the past, these days much more.

Between 12 and 3 am people come in to the laundry. We don't know what's going on. Make a lot of noise.

Maybe young people have come in.

We raised this with the Office of Housing.

A small house that police are in would be good.

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This meeting is a good idea ...  
I agree – using drug people are right in front of the door!

This is my story.  
I felt very lucky when I got government housing in Australia ...  
Now we can see that this public use of drugs has affected me, not only in  
my mind but in my heart  
It affected not only me, but my family.  
Before I came here I'd never seen it before

At night I play the music to try and escape from it  
but I can't

One day there might be a shock  
They might do something to us, maybe when walking along  
Someone might come from the back side ...  
When I face such kinds of things that might happen  
I have chest pains and it won't go away

I walk through here often.  
The drug use doesn't affect me.

You get syringes all over the playground and on the stairs.  
Yes, I tell my younger sister she must never use the stairs  
It's too dangerous

Even in our building people ring bells,  
Even at midnight these kinds of things happens

These people are not normal.

\*\*\*

Go and come, go and come, I can't say what they are doing.  
Now, for our future, for our children's future,  
I'm thinking when they're growing up they will be affected by it.  
We have to think about it.  
We are adults and we can understand and accept that drug users exist  
But it's different for children  
People are scared, not for themselves - for their children  
It affects so many things  
That's my experience.

It's getting worse.  
Everyone's worried, alert  
Keep eyes on each other  
It affects neighbours  
People can't trust each other  
It's very hard  
We don't know what to do.

I'm not afraid of them

Yes they make very noisy  
I say hello, how are you?  
I'm nice to them  
I don't isolate them  
So they're not above us – do you know what I mean?  
I know how to deal with them.

I went to the Office of Housing to report that drug users were being threatening.  
When I reported one of the guys came and he told me like this:  
'It's not our responsibility'.  
I was shocked.  
'If you want to report,' he said, 'you have to go to Security'.  
I went there because I have things to discuss with Office of Housing about this.  
Now I stand on the hopeless situation  
I'm very upset that day.

They need shelter too  
Where are they going to live if they're evicted?

I'm kind to them  
After a few days, one time, a guy that I helped died in the milkbar.

I see a lot of shooting up in alleyways ... I see syringes  
When I first came here a couple of years ago I worried that if they saw me they'd chase me.  
Now I keep my eyes down and ignore them  
I just stay away.  
I have friends with younger siblings  
I think about how it would affect them  
There are some areas that's fully ... has a lot junkies ... they do a lot of drugs.  
Last year my friends and I saw a guy who'd passed out  
We were afraid that maybe he'd seen us  
We ran away  
We were very scared!

They sneak in from the back, get in the lift.  
They come every day at 3 o'clock  
They come as a group.  
If one gets in by lift  
They'll let the rest in by the fire door.

We talked with the Police.  
A couple were kicked out by the Office of Housing  
But they're still there.

They don't like it if you talk to the Office of Housing.

You need to understand ... that for people with a drug problem  
Public housing is a last resort ...

What are they going to do if they lose their place?

I don't live on the Estate -  
My daughter goes to West Richmond Primary  
We see what happens.  
I don't feel threatened, but I can see what goes on  
And it could be something my kids have to deal with as they grow up.

Safe injecting facilities would solve these problems  
Take it off the Estate  
Make it a Council health problem

\*\*\*

Today I have to stand up and do something  
Ask the Office of Housing to help us to do something.  
Government tries to assist people to have a better life, working on the  
problem  
I think it is improving a little.

Taking out the drug dealers wouldn't do much  
People who bought from them could find them – they would have their  
phone number and find them  
They would go somewhere else.  
The process goes on in a never-ending cycle.

A few years' ago my house was burgled  
Whoever did it pulled the house apart  
The Police came. They suspected that whoever had done it was looking for  
money to support a habit  
They've been to many houses and seen the same thing.  
Whoever came in was after money to continue their habit.  
I go to Victoria Street for shopping  
Many times I'm approached for money.  
I would suspect those people had a habit.  
They are not drunk, I can tell you  
They are using. They have a habit.

In my back lane, secluded from the street  
There are syringes. We wrap them up and throw them away so no child is  
confronted with them.  
Police, Office of Housing ...  
In what way can they assist?

We need to have people living and working on the estate work together to  
make a difference to this local problem.

You never know if they're behind you ...  
They step up  
And you're finished.

In 106 it already happened

That someone was stabbed in the lift.

\*\*\*

How's it going where you live? Tell the truth!

Firstly in our area there is no satellite antenna.  
Only other buildings have them  
The rental is the same  
We can't understand why there's different treatment?

Secondly our building is not a safe place.  
Buying and selling drugs go on, people having injections  
A few households are involved in drug dealing  
I know which, but I can't speak out  
It would put me at risk.

Police officers come often to have inspections. That's good.  
But I think they're a bit silly. They always come wearing uniforms.  
The drug traffickers escape immediately.  
There are a lot of access points, so it's easy for them.  
It's useless if they come wearing uniforms  
In plain clothes it would not be hard to catch them.

Thirdly, parking is something we'd like to talk about.  
There is free access to parking  
People dealing drugs can park anywhere.  
So much buying and selling drugs goes on in cars.  
It'd be good if there was only one entrance, with a gate.

In a few weeks we'll do a BBQ, have the Police come, have Housing come  
So people can talk to them.  
We want to do it a few times over the next two months,  
The first one just small, and if the community likes it – make the next one  
bigger.  
Yeah, have the Police there cooking the sausages so you can ask them  
any questions, have Office of Housing come, have Yarra Council come  
Get the community talking to each other out in the open.

\*\*\*

I wish we could have a party often!  
Then people can come over to communicate with each other.  
Normally we don't have a chance  
We're just afraid for our security.  
That's why satellite antenna is important. We stay home.  
We don't understand the English channels.  
We want to get the satellite antenna for programs from our country.

Big trouble with us with this building  
People poo and wee there  
I just call Security.

Some of the lighting in doorways is not good.  
The cameras are good, but they're fixed in one direction  
Can you find out if a moving camera could be installed?

If you live very near the flat where the police have set up headquarters  
it's very peaceful  
Now people aren't coming making a noise.  
Being close to the Police is an advantage!

Things are improving.  
I notice that it's more peaceful. It's improving.  
Still sometimes people come to use but they are considerate;  
As soon as residents come out, they move.  
It's improving.  
They sit in front of the security door and when we come out they move.

They come into our lobby for using.  
They might say: Can you wait a minute? Won't be long! if they're in the  
middle of shooting up they let you know,  
Then they go.

Really? Is that true?

Oh yes, when they see that people will witness, they go away.  
If they see us coming from upstairs they go away.

When you see young girl doing it it breaks your heart.

Safe injecting room, it's confusing for me ...  
It's confusing for me too.  
Does the Council plan to set one up?

No look it's not legal in Victoria, Council can't do that at this point  
Council is supporting the idea, but they can't do it  
It's a very, very complex issue. It's very hard to support.

In two weeks' time we have a BBQ  
Cha cha cha! Party!

It's the worst problem in all Victoria.  
It's hard for the residents  
People need to come together.

Over the next four months we will meet regularly with people.  
Go and talk with different groups, keep writing down stories for a report  
In November we'll do a panel of residents.  
A formal meeting.

Oh, one more question ...  
Why did they move the chairs, do you know, the outdoor seating?  
Well they thought that people who are using drugs come and sit down and  
settle in.

Government, Housing thinks that's not good,  
Want to keep people moving,  
So they took the chairs out.

That's good ... yes that's good ... it's improving now we have the Police  
there ... it's much more peaceful. On behalf of our group we want to thank  
the government for doing something to improve things.

No names is good. We're very scared.  
We're scared of process ... we know that here it's not like our country  
Australia has no death penalty ...

Yes, we're also scared of process.  
In our country it's same ...

\*\*\*

See those people sitting there  
You know ...  
They're dealing drugs  
They want to bring people here  
And because they live here they say to Security  
These are my friends.

We can't be identified. People have been threatened.

I just got up, I'm half asleep  
My neighbour told me to come to the barbecue  
This is my breakfast  
You want to know about my experiences?  
Certainly I'll talk to you at another time, but I'm not ready to now.

I've come from Victoria Street  
I celebrate today for my ancestor day  
I bought flowers  
I like yellow very much.

Have a balloon -  
You can choose  
Do you like that blue one?

\*\*\*

The children are playing, that's good.  
Twenty-six years ago it was beautiful here  
Even 10 years ago it was still okay  
It's shocking now.  
Every week, every fortnight, they come to collect syringes  
They get more than 100 round the carpark.  
Syringes are a priority issue for us  
The syringe swap isn't happening any more  
They throw them everywhere

They get too many for free from the government.

It's getting better but it's still hard for the older people  
They used to sit here when they go to Victoria Street  
When they tired they have a rest  
But they often go out of their way, they don't use the path  
They're nervous. They go to Church Street or Lennox Street  
Lately you don't see them resting here.  
And then housing came and took away the benches.  
The junkies don't mind sitting on the concrete!

You can't stop it, there's nothing you can do.  
Everyone wishes it was nice and quiet,  
No trouble.

I share a laundry with six other tenants  
I went up to the laundry and I couldn't get in  
They were injecting at the doorway  
'You have to wait till we're finished'  
Sometimes you have to laugh. You know I'm angry, but it's ridiculous  
You have to laugh.

I'm Paul, it's my birthday. He's my brother.  
So what did you get?  
I gave him \$10 – I'm Peter, he's my brother – he's 57 today.  
We've been having a drink together.  
I'm not buying him no cake, I gave him \$10

Gaz, don't play games with me.  
I'm short.  
It was supposed to be \$300.  
I'm short. I'm not playing games. Cool it.  
I'll fix you up Monday.  
I promise.

\*\*\*

I've lived on the Estate since I was four or five  
We used to live near Bridge Road and then my parents couldn't afford the  
rent and we moved here  
It's pretty good I think  
It's a small community and people group up  
Like lots of kids from the flats went to the primary school I went to,  
Richmond West.

I came here not that young, fifteen –  
This is my fifth year in Australia  
It's my third year at the flats.  
For me it's just fine – younger kids may see it differently.  
At our age we're focused on sports  
There's a competition between the Carlton, Fitzroy and Richmond estates  
which is really good

I play football for Richmond Juniors just down the road  
Yeah, I barrack for Richmond ...

Drug users don't approach us.  
They'd usually be hanging round in the stairs area.  
Where we live you can often hear them screaming and talking to each other about things in the stairwell.  
I see them at the stairs and walk round them and kind of ignore them  
I guess I've become more confident as I've got older  
I know them more now, they're not bad people.  
When I was younger I would have been nervous.

My sister told me that I shouldn't go near them, that they were really aggressive ...

My family told me the exact same!  
I had a big imagination. I was so scared.  
Throw in TV shows about Melbourne like *Underbelly* – it's pretty intense

I can't describe it, my sister just instilled in me this big fear ...

Exactly the same, my parents did exactly the same.

\*\*\*

We'd like more activities for children  
The police have said they'd like to come to the café meeting. Would that be helpful? They really want to get involved.  
Yes, I think that's better. Some residents asked me why the police were at the barbeque?  
I told them that the police want to get to know the community and you can ask questions. Same with the Office of Housing. But the barbeque's a very public forum from all walks of life.  
It's not private  
People will see us talking  
It's not a good place for talking to the police.

It's better but there are still plenty.  
I'm not going to tell you who those people are, but if you can turn on the video you can see.  
Police are there 24/7  
Still many are there – they moved to Lennox Street where you can see the access points

One woman the other day at 6:30pm – she stands in the door talking on her phone and someone came and just ripped the mobile phone away from her.  
Scary

The barbeque got broken!  
It would be nice to have a barbeque in that place so that you don't have to bring one over.

Maybe a bit further along.  
Do some changes there. Make it nice. We could plant some flowers.

In the holidays, she's saying, she'd like you to have a meeting with the children, speak to them.  
The school holidays ... at the end of September ... OK, we can organise that.

## **Children**

*What's it like living here?*

I find we're secured  
You have neighbours right near  
I usually go straight home from school  
I go to Stitches sometimes – play games, make our own puzzles,  
competitions

If you need help with your homework  
You can call your brother or sister  
Or if you're doing colouring for fun  
Or if you scraped your knee  
You might ask someone for help when you're making food.  
They can give you a hand.  
Most of the kids from here go to West Richmond Primary  
You maybe will ask someone for help at school  
It's no problem.

There's Moon Lantern Festival  
It's magnificent  
Fun  
Beautiful  
Happy.  
All sorts of colours.  
It's exciting walking around  
We get to do lots of different things – games, lantern making,  
performance  
Lovely lanterns!  
This year mine was black red orange and yellow.

Are you talking about the people on Victoria Street?  
That kind of people?  
I see them a lot up there  
Sometimes they're hanging around on the Estate.  
I want kids to live a happy life round here.  
Sometimes my parents wouldn't let me go out somewhere by myself.  
They're sometimes very anxious.  
I think the younger kids are okay. They're with friends so they're safe.

At the age of 5 or 6 kids are okay, because they have their mum and dad  
Once I went with my Mum to Geelong, and I got a little lost  
If that happened that wouldn't be good

The little kids would go everywhere crying for their mum and dad  
Maybe they would be very frightened, especially at night time  
My mum worries a lot. She cares for her children. She doesn't want  
anything to happen to them.

I sometimes feel scared and frightened, especially at night-time.  
My mum told me she read the newspaper; there was this girl, 18 years  
old  
She was walking in this dark place, a laneway  
This guy got drugs and things, killed her  
Three years' later they found her at Footscray.  
I sometimes go past that laneway when I go home from school  
Lots of things happened there.

\*\*\*

We (refugee) women have been here between two and seven years  
We live in different buildings on the Estate  
We'd meet often if we had more time, but we're too busy!

Some people would be happier if they lived in a single house, they'd  
prefer that, but I feel very safe in the high rise.

I don't always feel safe. The lifts are very high.  
You can get scared if you are up on the top floors, especially if you're  
alone by yourself.  
How would you get to anyone if something happens?

Our kids have more friends compared to people living in single dwellings.  
In summer we come together outdoors.  
It's nice when you see people.  
We appreciate it.

Do we notice drug use? ... Drugs? Yes of course.  
In the laundry, outside – you see syringes on the floor, on the stairs.  
Sometimes they urinate in the lifts.  
Nobody actually sees people selling, but we know they're doing it  
The drug users swear, they yell, they're very loud,  
I get nervous around them.  
They're not really friendly. They come across with a weird vibe.  
They're strange. They smoke in the lifts  
They're anti-social  
They don't speak to you.

Sometimes they'll be in the lifts and you'll be frightened all the way down.  
Sometimes it's better to wait outside and let the lifts go.  
They tease us, say inappropriate things.  
We can't say anything back to them.  
We ignore them and keep going.

So really we're happy about living here  
But not so happy about going outside.

Mostly you're afraid of the influence it'll have on your kids  
When we see a broken down user we say 'This is what happens if you  
take drugs'

The older kids can understand.

This is not something we had at home.

We know it's a bad thing, there's no good end to it.

We tell our kids not to try, not to be around it.

Younger children are exposed to it, it's out there,  
they might want to try it, because it's available.

If they give information at school it will help as well,  
but it would be good not to see that at all.

A 15 year old boy exposed to drugs was using

His parents didn't know

Then one day they saw his arms.

He opened the window and he wanted to jump

The other kids were holding him back.

Yes, what we're scared of is anything happening to our kids

One thing I want to mention is that I have a real problem with the people  
living above and below

At a certain time they are very noisy. It's a sound like metal scraping,  
hitting the ground.

We can't sleep.

We told Security, but they told us we must report it to the Housing  
Commission.

We haven't done that because something might happen to us.

And another thing... at the milkbars round here, under 18 kids are buying  
cigarettes.

It would be good to enforce the regulation, even if people will buy for the  
young kids.

It would be good to enforce the regulation.

\*\*\*

We're Indigenous residents of the Estate

And at the Moon Lantern Festival we felt ashamed – the people at the  
Indigenous Tent at the front gate were openly drunk.

We already feel ashamed.

So many Indigenous people in this area are users  
and everyone always assumes we're also doing that.

They label us.

\*\*\*

There are only two safe places for children on the estate – inside the flats  
or in the open areas outside.

Some children have witnessed violent incidents

And I've also heard that they are able to get into the security guards'  
booths and may see things they shouldn't see.

\*\*\*

I witnessed a person being bashed up over 100 grams of drugs near the  
community garden in Lennox Street  
In the evening while I was in the garden beside the side street  
Better street lighting would be good

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**1. Evidence:** Police made 151 visits to Richmond Estate in October.

Resident evidence is more about feeling unsafe, afraid, threatened, worried for others than it is about calls for more arrests

**Recommendation 1.1:** That REAG promotes a shift in emphasis by the Richmond Police to patrolling, protecting residents, focusing on harm minimisation and forming visible protection for play and recreation areas at specific times.

**Recommendation 1.2:** That REAG invites different Agencies each month to have an information session with Tenants, for example with Police, Office of Housing.

**2. Evidence:** Police highlighted cycle of drug dependency in regard to residents approaching drug users.

**Recommendation 2.1:** That REAG seeks information about the role of the Health Centre. In particular: Does NRCHC provide outreach services to users?

**Recommendation 2.2:** That REAG consults with the Office of Housing about the collection of needles and syringes. For example, is the collection frequent enough? Do collection services go to all places where needles and syringes are left? Are there enough disposal bins? What are the obligations of the Needle and Syringe Exchange for the lifecycle of syringes on the Estate?

**3. Evidence:** Panellist found a beautiful 15 year old boy at her door. She asked why he was hiding. He said he was a bad person. She hugged him. In her view he took the drug because he came from a broken family with a recent divorce.

**Recommendation 3.1:** That REAG investigates ways of collecting testimony on damage to families and communities of drug use, so that we learn more lessons from these stories about ways to reduce harm and care for each other.

**Recommendation 3.2:** That REAG asks the Community Health Centre to provide more counselling to young residents and their families on the Estate.

**Recommendation 3.3** That REAG investigate opportunities for young people at risk and elders learn from each other in groups. Older people have a duty toward children, and children can learn and experience love.

- 4. Evidence:** Residents who are alone feel less safe, more fearful and less empowered. There is strength in numbers. Residents need information.
- Recommendation 4.1:** That REAG promotes meetings on the weekends for tenants with information in different languages through interpreters.
- Recommendation 4.2:** That REAG investigates strategies for making meetings on the Estate more family friendly and opportunities to share culture, such as happens at Atherton Gardens (not just once a year Moon Lantern).
- Recommendation 4.3:** That REAG promotes the establishment of a community café on the estate.
- Recommendation 4.4:** That REAG develop a website to make information about the estate publicly available.
- Recommendation 4.5:** That REAG hosts regular forums between Office of Housing, Police, Wilson Security and residents.
- 5. Evidence:** Residents see many details of drug dealing but are afraid of reporting, and there is no easy channel to do so.
- Recommendation 5.1:** That REAG discuss with the Office of Housing the placing of suggestion boxes in all foyers, labelled in different languages.
- Recommendation 5.2:** That REAG lead a discussion with estate residents about photo ID being required at entry to the high-rise buildings.
- 6. Evidence:** There are changes afoot at the Estate, for example people surveying in the grounds of the Estate. The Office of Housing is developing a Master Plan which will affect the public space and may make many of our recommendations irrelevant.
- The common areas are not safe or attractive.
- Recommendation 6.1:** That REAG convenes a panel process like this, but on a larger scale than this one, to get information and broad and diverse points of view that enable residents to have a real influence on the development of the Master Plan.
- Recommendation 6.2:** That REAG seek advice from the Botanic Gardens to develop better landscaping and make the common areas more active and attractive places, and bring pathways to Australian Standards.
- Recommendation 6.3:** That REAG promote the building of playgrounds for young kids and older teens.
- Recommendation 6.4:** That REAG promotes the establishment of a community gym that caters for all ages, from 10-12 year olds to people in their 60s and 70s.

**7. Evidence:** The Exceloo toilet in Victoria Street is being used as an injecting room. The only way it's safe seeing you can only go in by yourself, is that the doors open after 10 minutes. It's used by large numbers of users every day for convenience and privacy.

There has been so much evidence of unsafe injecting practice on the Estate.

**Recommendation 7.1:** That REAG promote the establishment of a safe injecting room away from residential accommodation and the school.

**8. Evidence** Drug users use laundries and stairwells for injections.

**Recommendation 8.1:** That laundry facilities on the estate are moved into people's flats.

**Recommendation 8.2.:** That Wilson Security should identify the tenants that they suspect of illegal drug activities and report this information to police or Crime Stoppers.

**Recommendation 8.3:** That REAG promotes the advertising of Crime Stoppers throughout the estate, including carparks. This should be in relevant community languages.

**Recommendation 8.4:** That REAG ask Police to ensure Crime Stoppers makes follow-up calls to informants who have provided their contact details.

**Recommendation 8.5:** That REAG investigate the establishment of a letter writing service for people who are not confident writing in English.

**9. Evidence:** Outsiders come to use the facilities of the Estate.

**Recommendation 9.1:** Security should monitor the suspects and what building level they get out of the lift at, and then report this to Patrolling officers, so they can go to the building level to find out whatever is happening there.

**10. Evidence:** Residents feel for these people.

Residents are exposed face-to-face with:

- Unpredictable behaviour eg aggressive disagreement, pushing, requests for money, and also people collapsing or overdosing
- Police, Office of Housing, Security advise that residents keep themselves safe

**Recommendation 10.1:** That REAG investigate ways that residents can be provided with information and training on non-confrontational ways of engaging with and making a difference in such situations.



## **RELATED DOCUMENTS:**

Richmond Residents' Panel Project Proposal, April 2011

Richmond Residents' Panel Project Final Report, December 2011

*These may be obtained from*

The Richmond Estate Action Group  
C/- 112 Elizabeth Street  
Richmond  
Victoria 3121

*or*

Morgan Scholz  
Neighbourhood Justice Centre  
241 Wellington Street  
Collingwood  
Victoria 3066

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