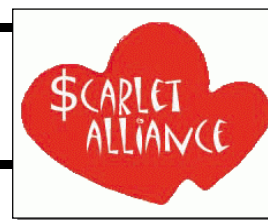


## National Forum for Sex Worker Organisations & Projects

P. O. Box 2072, Canberra ACT 2601  
Mobile: 0411 985 135  
[president@scarletalliance.org.au](mailto:president@scarletalliance.org.au)  
[www.scarletalliance.org.au](http://www.scarletalliance.org.au)



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You might remember 'Straight from the whores mouth' and my brilliant predecessor Sera. It's well and truly over time for resurrection of the column and because it's been awhile this edition I will take the opportunity to introduce you to Scarlet Alliance. In the future though I will focus on the key issues effecting sex workers in Australia.

Formed in 1989, following the first HIV, Laws & Sex Work Conference, Scarlet Alliance is the national peak body of sex worker organisations/projects. Our membership of community based organisations meets each year for a national forum open to member delegates and local sex workers. This year it will be in Sydney. At the National Forum we elect our executive and spokespersons and hold three days of workshops, skill share opportunities and presentations. The elected executive then meets once a month with a high level of contact maintained with our membership and sex worker communities via a lively e-list as well as sex worker only and member only sections of our website.

Scarlet Alliance plays an active role in Australias response to HIV/AIDS as well as lobbying for improved legislative frameworks for sex workers and addressing discrimination against current and former sex workers. With proposed change to sex industry laws in Western Australia, Queensland, Tasmania and to Licensing fees in Victoria, within the last two year period, law reform has been high on our agenda. All submissions and briefing papers as well as our publications: *Principles for Model Sex Industry Legislation*; *Unjust and Counter Productive: The Failure of Governments to Protect Sex Workers from Discrimination*; are available on our website at: [www.scarletalliance.org.au](http://www.scarletalliance.org.au).

The Scarlet Alliance website will also provide information on our most recent community education sessions and workshops. One such event in Sydney included a presentation by Kenn Robinson, a Sydney educator, who outlined the role of sex workers as safe sex educators of their clients who largely do not perceive themselves to be at risk of sexually transmissible infections.

These skills were showcased when a group of Scarlet Alliance educators presented 'Whorigami - The art of towel rolling, folding and shaping' as a skills building workshop at the XVth World Aids conference in Bangkok in July. While the workshop title drew on the theme of towels, often used as a decorative element in many Australian sex industry workplaces, it aimed to highlight the range of issues which impact on a sex workers ability to negotiate safe sex.

A group of 80 workshop participants witnessed a role play between sex worker and client, and were asked to identify skills utilized by the sex worker. The demonstration covered the first few minutes of a booking where a sex worker negotiates a price, service, and condom use; establishes boundaries around what is included; performs an STI check; and undertakes a risk assessment.

Participants noted a broad range of skills with many attendees understanding for the first time sex work within the context of work. This lead into a discussion about different work settings, how these skills are transferable and the factors which act as barriers to sex workers implementing condom use and negotiation strategies etc. Not surprisingly the major issues identified were laws which criminalize sex workers affecting traditional working practices and safety strategies.

While the workshop left none of the participants with any doubt of the professionalism of sex workers in Australia it did find at least one attendee reflecting on the contrast between this high

level of skill and the stereotypes which drive the proposed changes to sex industry laws put forward in Australia over the last two years.

The reality is many sex workers are not able to speak out publicly for fear of discrimination. While we are silenced by stigma the stereotypes go unchallenged allowing legislators to introduce laws based on an impression of sex work more closely aligned with that portrayed in 'The Bill' than our experiences in Australia. The resulting laws further stigmatise and criminalize our work and our lives.

Of course, the responsibility for poor legislation does not rest with individual sex workers. A pervasive lack of knowledge about the industry and the working lives of sex workers clouds many forums. Even more disturbing though is what seems to be the desire, by some, to perpetuate the stereotypes. The workshop described above received rave reviews from organizers and participants of the World Aids Conference and yet was banned by the Education Minister from inclusion at the Adult Community Educators Conference (ACE) at home in Australia!

To find out more about Scarlet Alliance visit [www.scarletalliance.org.au](http://www.scarletalliance.org.au).