

Scarlet in the 90s - An incomplete history...

By Sue Metzenrath

To set the scene for the 1990s, let me take you back to 1988...the *Sex Industry and the AIDS Debate Conference* was held in Melbourne (25-27 Oct), where resolutions were adopted for the formation of a steering committee (SC) that would drive the creation of a national body. This SC met in Adelaide on 27-29 September 1989. I attended as the ACT delegate and so began my involvement with Scarlet. The other delegates were: Deb Milka (PASA, S.A), Jo (NT), Kris Andersen (SQWISI, Qld), Andrew Hunter (PCV, Vic) and Stella Sharland (SIERA, WA). Due to the inability of the neutral NSW delegate to attend, representatives from PROS and SWANS were consulted on the phone. They were Diana Alan (SWANS) and Yolanda Corduff (PROS). Andi Sebastian acted as facilitator (Hunter 1989).

We took the name Scarlet Alliance (note the initials SA for South Australia) in recognition of the first ever sex worker organisation formed in Australia in 1978.

For a discussion of when sex worker organisations formed in all states and territories and their relationship with AIDS Councils and AFAO see Sebastian 1990.

The SC established Scarlet as a forum for sex worker rights organisations that would come together to develop policy, programs & responses mainly around HIV & related legal & human rights issues for sex workers. It would act as a clearinghouse for information dissemination and support the development of newly forming organisations. I think it's worth revisiting the original aims in the first constitution for it strongly reflects the thinking of the activists at the time so I have included it as appendix 1.

We aimed high in the belief that Scarlet would get funding in its own right, however the Commonwealth believed that Scarlet was not ready and so funding was channeled through AFAO. A statement of agreement was negotiated with AFAO by Andrew Hunter (who also wrote the proposal), Leanne Joyce (AFAO) & I attended as an observer since I was new to sex worker politics). AFAO's role would be administrative and financial, while Scarlet maintained program and managerial responsibility and accountability (Hunter 1989). Some of the initial projects included:

employment of a national organiser (Andrew Hunter was the first employee), funding for national meetings, a national education, training and skill sharing program, national staff and volunteer development program, needs assessment for HIV+ sex workers (Cheryl Overs was employed for this), central resource project for information collection and dissemination, creation of educational and resource materials (including newsletter), funding for the 2nd national sex industry conference, national workshop on HIV/AIDS services to transient and prostitute youth, health & legal education and advocacy as well as outreach and service provision to HIV+ SWs.

As a result of the political climate at the time (ie unwillingness of Federal government to fund four separate national organisations dealing with HIV; namely AIVL, NAPWA, Scarlet & AFAO), the initial funding for Scarlet which had only up until then been administered by AFAO, now became absorbed into AFAO. It led to the creation of a policy position for sex work issues, which was filled by Geoffrey Fysh. This position took on some of the previous functions of Scarlet but with less funding and largely supported through the voluntary input of Scarlet executive members and delegates (1991-1995?). Eventually, the separate policy positions attached to the national organisations became generic with the creation of a policy team taking direction from the AFAO executive. At this point we had to fight tooth and nail to get our issues up as the AIDS Councils controlled the numbers on AFAO executive and committee level. I'd like to make a special mention here of Linda Banach who worked tirelessly and diligently with Scarlet members to develop some of the most important policy positions on sex worker issues during the mid to late 90s. Their legacy has stood the test of time. The most important being *Principles for Model Sex Industry Legislation*, co-written with myself in 2000 and referenced by scholars and governments around the world.

I maintained an interest through this period as a management committee member of WISE and as a delegate to Scarlet. I'm stating right here that this is an incomplete history since I know people like Andrew Hunter and Cheryl Overs were very involved in the early 90s at the organisational and administrative level. Fiona Patten became convenor and was very active until the mid nineties when I became Co-convenors with Jenni Gamble from SIN & managed to achieve quite a number of things in a voluntary

capacity.

The nineties were heady days for the sex worker rights movement in Australia and what sticks most in my mind is the amazing intellectual, political and emotional input from all the committed whores of the time. They were heady days since so much was going on including legal changes in many states, the defunding and demise of some organisations and the rebirth and birth of others.

As a collective we also developed great political lobbying skills and became very active in generating media coverage. At a fundamental level we had some of the most heartbreaking debates at this time about essential issues for sex worker self organisation and it was not unusual for some of these meetings to end in tears, at times screaming matches and walkouts. These centred around issues of disclosure or non-disclosure, the rights of sex workers and non-sex workers within the organisation and who should have voting rights. The Scarlet Alliance had its first meeting from 23-25 April 1990 in Sydney and only formally became incorporated in 1996. Our commitment to Asia Pacific regional issues were initiated and consolidated during the 90s, culminating with a Scarlet AGM being held to coincide with the Kuala Lumpur International Congress of AIDS in Asia and the Pacific (ICAAP) Conference of 1998 and being central to providing strong support for the Asia Pacific Network of Sex Work projects. At an international level many Scarlet members were active participants at international HIV/AIDS conferences and whorenets.

We achieved much through our collective actions, mainly driven by our passion for sex worker rights and the freely given time of many. I'd like to name a few of the people who were most active within Scarlet at this time and of course it is an incomplete list: Andrew Hunter, Cheryl Overs, Jenni Gamble, Erica Red, Alex Holt, Maria MacMahon, Alison Arnott-Bradshaw, Carol Holly, Fiona Patten, Sera Pinwill, Lee Christison, Wendy Joy, Alison Murray, Maryann Phoenix, Leisha Host, Felicity Lewis, Janelle Fawkes, Keith Gilbert, Kirk Peterson, Kenn Robinson, Brad Reuter, Patricia Whiteley, Leanne Melling. Of course most of these people were delegates to Scarlet or executive members so I guess their names stand out, but they carried with them the views and support of the sex workers and organisations they represented. A 21st birthday celebration provides an opportune time to reflect on the great

achievements and perhaps it may be a time to consider the creation of a "*Whores Hall of Fame*" with the granting of life membership of Scarlet and a small bio for the archives. In solidarity... Sue Metzenrath.

The achievements were many and I list a few here:

- Support against SIERAs (WA) defunding 1995
- Support for the creation of new sex worker organisation in NT (namely SIANT) after PANTHER was defunded 1995
- Review of Sex worker education in 1998 conducted by Lea Shaw
- National Guidelines for Occupational Health and Safety in the Sex Industry – strongly and tirelessly driven by Sera Pinwill.
- I successfully lobbied for funding for a National Training Project to look at skills required for staff of sex worker organisations in 2001.

Submissions/Reports/Briefs:

- Submission to the Feacham Evaluation of the National HIV/AIDS Strategy 1993/94 to 1995/96.
- Australian Law Reform Commission's "Under the Spotlight – complaints against the AFP and NCA" 1995.
- Commonwealth Parliament's Human Rights and Democracy in Burma Inquiry 1996
- Submission to discussion paper on Prostitution, formulated by the WA opposition
- Submission to South Australia's Social Development Committee Report on Prostitution
- Briefing paper for the ANCA Reference Group informing the development of the National HIV/AIDS strategy
- The Scarlet Alliance produced a brief entitled: "Proposal to insert offences in the Commonwealth Criminal Code- prohibiting slavery, including sex slavery".
- Membership of HIDNA (HIV international Development Network of Australia) (Maria MacMahon, Sue Metzenrath)
- Rights of HIV+Sex Workers – Kirk Peterson 1998 and adopted by the Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers meeting 29March-1 April 1998.
- Representation on ANCA

Conferences:

- Attendance at International HIV/AIDS Conference (Vancouver

1996) Sue Metzenrath

- Attendance at International HIV/AIDS Conference (Geneva 1998) Sera Pinwill
- Attendance at International HIV/AIDS Conference (Durban 2000) Sue Metzenrath
- I got funding through UNAIDS for an Asia/Pacific sex worker skill share in Manila in October 1997, which was followed by the first meeting of Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers (Calcutta 29March-1 April 1998).
- Is Sex Politics?, oral presentation, Australia New Zealand Political Science Association, 2000 (Metzenrath)
- Trafficking in Women or Labour Migration? oral presentation, Culture, Ethnicity and Sexual Health Forum, Sydney, 29 Oct 1998 (Metzenrath)
- Keynote speaker, Sex Industry Law Reform Forum, 15th April, 1998, Adelaide, South Australia (Metzenrath)
- Research for/by sex workers: An ethical issues dilemma, workshop, 4th International Congress on AIDS in Asia & the Pacific, 25-29 Oct 1997 (Metzenrath)
- Labour Migration for the Purposes of working in the sex industry and its implications for HIV/AIDS Education and Prevention, oral presentation, 4th International Congress on AIDS in Asia & the Pacific, 25-29 Oct 1997 (Metzenrath)
- Overview of Sex Industry Laws in Australia, oral presentation, 1st National Conference on HIV and Sex Work, St Kilda, Australia, 2-3 April 1996 (Metzenrath)

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Committees I participated in:

- Member, Legal Working Party. Australian National Council on AIDS, Hepatitis and Related Diseases, 2001.
- Member, HIV Vaccines Trials Ethical Committee. Australian National Council on AIDS, Hepatitis and Related Diseases, 2001.
- Member, Organising Committee, XII International Conference on AIDS, Durban, 2000
- Member, Advisory Committee, Evaluation of National HIV/AIDS Strategy 1998-99, 2000.
- Member, International Policy Group, Australian Federation of AIDS Organizations, 1998-2000
- Adviser/Participant, Developing an interactive teaching model to improve students analytical skills, School of Social Inquiry, Women's Studies, Faculty of Arts, Deakin University, Aug 1999.
- Member, Advisory Committee, Evaluation of National HIV/AIDS

Strategy 1996-97, 1998.

- Member, social research committee paper reviewer, 4th International Congress on AIDS in Asia & the Pacific, Manila, 25-29 Oct 1997

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Strategic Alliances:

- International Transport Federation, Australian Workers Union, Miscellaneous Workers Union, Textile, Clothing and Footwear Union garnishing support for the creation of labour laws for remedies to support workers whose labour is exploited irrespective of the industry that they are in.

Some of my publications during this period:

- Compulsory Testing of Sex Workers: A discussion, in HIV/AIDS and Prostitution: The Global Top 25 Resources. Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, 2000.
- Buying/Selling Sex in Australia, 1999. Social Alternatives 18 (3). Guest editor.
- To Test or not to Test, 1999. Social Alternatives 18 (3): 25-30.
- Sexual Servitude, 1999. National AIDS Bulletin 12 (4).
- Sex Work Law Reform, 1997. HIV/AIDS Legal Link 8 (4): 8-9.
- What Access? Whose Equity? National AIDS Bulletin, 11(2): 19.
- The State of Australia's Sex Work Laws, National AIDS Bulletin, 10 (5): 18.
- Sex Workers and the National Women's Health Policy in: Changing Society for Women's Health: Proceedings of the 3rd National Women's Health Conference, 17-19 November 1995, ANU, Canberra. Editors J. Davis et al.

Bibliography:

Banach, L and Metzenrath S 2000, *Principles for Model Sex Industry Legislation*, Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations, Sydney.

Hunter A 1989, Draft statement of agreement between the Scarlet Alliance and the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations in *Addendum to AFAO Budget Submission 89/90 from Scarlet Alliance a national forum of sex worker rights organisations*.

Hunter A 1989, *Addendum to AFAO Budget Submission 89/90 from Scarlet Alliance a national forum of sex worker rights organisations*, Section 3.2 Sex Worker Education.

Sebastian A 1990, *Who's in bed with whom?*, National AIDS Bulletin, June 1990.

Appendix 1:

Scarlet Alliance 1989, *Aims of the Scarlet Alliance* in Scarlet Alliance Constitution.

Appendix 2:

Scarlet Letters 1989 (?) - 1st Scarlet Alliance newsletter

Other:

Scarlet History <http://www.scarletalliance.org.au/who/history/>

Stigma and discrimination wont bring us down Indig sex workers
http://www.afao.org.au/library/topic/living-with-hiv/HIVA-11-3_Updated_251113.pdf

Andrew memorial

http://www.nswp.org/sites/nswp.org/files/SW%20digest%20Issue%206_0.pdf

My paper – In touch with the needs of sex workers research for sex work <http://www.polsis.uq.edu.au/dialogue/Vol%208/Jeffreys.pdf>

Metzenrath, S. "Sex Slavery: Proposed Changes to Criminal Code May Not be the

Answer". HIV/AIDS Legal Link. Vol. 8, No. 1, 1997, pp. 5-7.

referenced in TENTH

UNITED NATIONS CONGRESS

ON THE PREVENTION OF CRIME

AND THE TREATMENT OF OFFENDERS

Vienna, Austria, 10 - 17 April 2000

http://www.unodc.org/pdf/crime/trafficking/RA_UNICRI.pdf

Referenced in Murray – Don't believe the hype

<http://www.plri.org/sites/plri.org/files/MurrayDebtBondage.pdf>