



## My red umbrella tattoo and what it means to me



In the middle of last year I did it, I walked into a tattoo parlour in St Kilda on the way back from RhED and had a red umbrella tattooed on my left arm...

It was one of those moments where it just felt right, here I was in St Kilda, the sex worker capital of Melbourne,

with 300 dollars in my brown, faux leather handbag. I just thought to myself, fuck it, this is gonna be my first tattoo!!

So I went in and enquired and showed her a pic of what I wanted on Google Images... She told me to print it off at the library which was two doors down so I did it... I'd never had a tattoo before and yes it did kinda hurt, but was it worth it? Yes it was!!

The red umbrella represents sex workers as the strong, independent, hard working honest people we are... It is our universal icon that symbolises the fight for our rights, respect, safety and integrity as workers and as someone who is lucky enough to live in a country where sex work is legal and relatively safe and socially acceptable, it is something that has truly turned my life around and given me stability, independence, freedom, happiness and the ability to earn a full time living without any family or government benefits doing what I love and enjoy...

Whenever I am out and about, whether it is a simple trip down to Woolies to buy a mango, or whether I am standing up and speaking to my fellow sex workers at an event, this symbol stays proudly on my arm... Sex work is like a community to me and when other workers who are out and about see this on my arm they know that they are not alone and that I am proud to be a marked woman and I will always fight for the rights of my sex worker peers...

Sex work is a sisterhood to me, whether we're in the brothels or on the street, we're all having sex to earn a living and I think it is extremely important that we stick together because this can be a dark and scary world, especially for people like us who put out bodies on the line, we need to realise that we shouldn't see one another as enemies or competition, we're all unique and we're all valuable, we're all human and we all deserve to be able to do our job in a world where we can be safe

and respected as hard working citizens of every society since the dawn of humanity and as long as our species exists...

This is the world's oldest profession and in a society obsessed with both sex and money, I don't think it's going anywhere. Paying people for sex is evolutionarily wired into men's brains and a woman using what she's gifted with to help get by in the world is instinct too. Sex work is slowly becoming more and more socially acceptable and people are slowly starting to understand just how valuable we are to society and see us for who we are and not the tarnished depictions in the media. It makes me feel so happy and accomplished knowing that I'm at the forefront of such a powerful movement, both as a sex worker and as an activist and every time I see my fellow sex workers gain rights or respect it warms my heart!!!

Sex worker rights are not just important to me as a sex worker, but as a human in general. I truly care about the wellbeing of my species and hope all vulnerable people in society can one day live in harmony with the world, to be able to reach their dreams living a happy prosperous life. Sex worker rights are human rights and I know that with enough red umbrellas held high, we will some day wash away the stigma and double standards that prevent us from blossoming into the beautiful flowers we are!!

- Vaylira

