

Together we do better:

Mainstream Leveraging, "It's About Bloody Time"...

FOR THE
HAND



It's clear: LGBT young people are largely going unsupported; those individuals, projects and organizations providing LGBT support are overcapacity; more needs to be done.

Let me start by looking big picture and then turning my attention locally

BIGGER PICTURE

It has been suggested, including from a major LGBT organisation, that a national challenging homophobia conference would be a great way to build on the networks I have gathered over the course of the Beyond 'That's So Gay' tour and in my travels since. With an upcoming funding possibility, said organisation wanted to know what I thought.

Let us start with a few assumptions:

- LGBT organisations, projects and groups are invariably under-resourced, under threat and stretched with little, if any, capacity to take on any new work. Most could not, but would want to, attend a national conference;
- Mainstream and philanthropic organisations can be, and often house, LGBT allies;
- These allies rarely, if at all, get the opportunity to focus specifically on LGBT issues; and,
- Talking to both allies and LGBT support workers invariably highlights quick, easy and helpful ways that all can work together for the benefit of LGBT (young) people.

Instead of an (other) LGBT conference, I have suggested a step before something like a (nother) conference.

What if we were to hold a weekend gathering that involved the key LGBT stakeholders around the country as well as key members (and allies) within mainstream and philanthropic organisations?

What if the goal was to look at how mainstream and philanthropic organisations could incorporate more LGBT and challenging homophobia education into their existing work?

What if another goal was to look at ways key LGBT stakeholders could meaningfully work with mainstream and philanthropic organisations, both immediately and in the longer-term?

What if under-resourced key LGBT stakeholders were funded to get to that weekend gathering?

What if it was held on "neutral" territory for mainstream attendees and it was well facilitated and semi-structured?

It's clear that we could be wiser and more strategic with our engagement of the allies, especially those lying dormant in the mainstream giants. I'm currently on the editorial board of the International Journal for LGBT Youth and the main editor is Professor James T. Sears (www.lgbt-today.com/staff/james-t-sears-phd). In the journal James has presented an LGBT possibility and opportunity matrix and he's a huge fan of Australia and New Zealand. What James argues is that the climate is ideal for Australia to leverage the resources, spread and authority of mainstream organisations for the greater good. He sincerely believes Australia can be an enduring world leader in all things L, G, B and T.

LOCAL LEVEL ('CUPPAS')

Throughout the Beyond 'That's So Gay' tour blogs ways in which mainstream organisations can be engaged were discussed. In short, a cuppa was set up by:

- Calling every local mainstream organisation;
- Introducing the tour idea;
- Asking who would be the best person to talk to about the tour;
- Asking that person if they could spare 15 to 20 minutes to have a quick cuppa and hear more;
- Meeting on that person's turf;
- Turning 15 to 20 minutes into 45 to 60 minutes

The questions asked were:

1. What is life like here for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) young people? (if "there are none", imagine what their experience might be like if they were here)
2. What are the challenges in supporting LGBT young people? (what are the challenges in challenging and interrupting homophobic language and other behaviours?)
3. What could happen in the next 3-6 months that would make it easier for you to support LGBT young people (and challenge homophobia)?
4. What could you do in your role to make an immediate difference to young LGBT people in the area? What about your organisation?
5. What would you need to get started right now?



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Local LGBT contacts, state and territory-wide LGBT support information and anything else of use was always offered and left behind.

What might happen locally if you and other locals visited every mainstream organisation in your area and had a ‘cuppa’?

Remember what most people said, LGBT or not, around the entire country when they heard about the Beyond ‘That’s So Gay’ tour: It’s about bloody time!

For an extensive discussion and exploration of how to engage, assess and impact on school and community organisation readiness successfully read Daniel Witthaus’ Beyond ‘That’s So Gay’: Challenging homophobia in Australian schools (Hawker Brownlow Education, 2010): www.hbe.com.au or www.thatssogay.com.au/book

See also the Part III of the Beyond ‘That’s So Gay’ Summary Series 2011: Mainstream at

www.thatssogay.com.au/findings

It’s the everyday conversations generated by the Beyond ‘That’s So Gay’ Tour that lead to change. Rather than thinking we have to do something extraordinary, instead we could think about what we can do with the people around us.

For 38 weeks worth of everyday community examples, go to www.thatssogay.com.au



Talk, Share, Change:

A short-term opportunity for long-term gain...

The lack of connection between those that support lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) young people and the challenge of what, particularly in regional, rural and remote (rrr) Australia, to do about it is not a new one.

Background to sharing a cuppa

Whilst working with Kids Help Line - an Australian telephone counseling service for children and young people - we faced a similar dilemma for educators across Victoria and Tasmania. In 2004-5 we piloted a project to connect teachers and other educators it had trained in the Peer Skills Program. The Peer Skills Program is a two-day workshop to enhance the ability of young people to be able to listen and problem-solve, and provide them with the skills to help their peers when problems arise. It is based on evidence that young people often seek out their peers when they are experiencing difficulties.

(For more on the Peer Skills Program: mhws.agca.com.au/mmppi_detail.php?id=19)



“Cuppa and Cake”: Australia

To copy the Peer Skills educator format is easy.

1. **Locate another LGBT support worker or educator, or more, within 3-4 hours travel of you; (which means no more than 1-2 hours travel for each person)**
2. **Organise to meet “halfway” at a café that is “special”; (i.e. known for making great food and coffee)**
3. **Share “coffee and a cuppa”**
4. **Complete 3-5 straightforward tasks with a focus on increasing the feeling of “connectedness”, sharing your experiences and learning new ideas;**
5. **Document the meeting, even if only a paragraph and a photo, and share it**

(this allowed for creativity, with some suggestions) – and you could send it to: daniel@thatssogay.com.au

Peer Skills educators were then reimbursed for their cuppa and cake, but at the time of writing, unfortunately Beyond ‘That’s So Gay’ cannot do so. At least yet!

Given the number of calls from children and young people in rural and regional areas, the organisation focused on training educators in these areas in the Australian states of Victoria and Tasmania. Peer Skills project workers found that educators were more likely to use the skills and strategies they had learnt when they:

- Felt more “connected” to other educators in their region who had been trained in the Peer Skills Program;
- Shared their own experiences of what worked well and what didn’t with these educators;
- Heard ideas on how to overcome everyday “barriers” and “hurdles” to effectively working with students.

Unable to regularly organise, fund and attend rural and regional “gatherings” of educators, an idea was developed to encourage educators to meet, share and learn that was not resource intensive. Educators were invited to share “coffee and cake” with a peer, which they could explain to their employer organisation as a legitimate networking and professional development opportunity.



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Option One:

Complete the following discussion points:

- Tell me about your journey to this work (and feel free to take your time telling it);
- What are 3-5 strategies and/or resources that work for you in this work, and why?;
- What are 2-3 strategies and/or resources that do not work for you in this work, and why?;
- What are 2-3 ways that this work could be promoted to educators in your area?; and,
- How could we share what we've learnt today with others?

Option Two:

Complete an interview with your 'cuppa and cake' buddy (this can also be used to collect LGBT stories locally):

- If they are openly LGBT: Tell me about your journey to your identity, If they are not openly LGBT or straight: Tell me about your journey to this work
- What have been some of the challenges in your life? How have you overcome the challenges in your life?
- What have you done to overcome these challenges? What could others have done to make a difference? What could they do now?
- What are you most proud of in your life?
- What are your hopes for the future?

Thoughts

Experience showed that some Peer Skills-trained educators expressed discomfort in enjoying "cuppas and cake" with funds that could be focused on work with young people. There is the very real possibility that some LGBT workers and educators might not see their own networking and professional needs as directly important in furthering this work in their region. At Kids Help Line we found it effective to explain the reasoning behind the "coffee and cake" meetings, the relatively low amounts of funding directed to this activity and the positive outcomes (e.g. *it means more of the work will take place*).

Imagine if this was funded nationally? What benefits might we see?

For more on good quality professional development and student workshops, go to: www.thatssogay.com.au



A reminder:

Young LGBT people's hopes...

"They say it's better these days, and maybe to some degree they're right... We know it depends... But we want to live in an Australia where we can hold the hand of the person we love without fear or concern for our safety... And we want to live in an Australia where it doesn't depend... We'd like to think it will get better, but there are plenty of ways it can be better right now..."

Young LGBT people

What are your hopes for the future?

"I don't want to and I don't have to move away..."

Young gay man, regional Australia

"Probably the same as everyone... I want to meet someone, I want to be content with them, to build a life together... I want to build a house with him, have a good group of friends around me and basically do what I want..."

Young gay man, rural Australia

"I want to be happy... I hope to live somewhere and be who I am, whatever that looks like and I guess it's something that is happening at the moment... I have a family and I have a little brother who I adore and would do anything for and a mother who I love... I want all that here..."

Young lesbian, regional Australia

"I'm studying psychology... I do see it as a bit of a need for Indigenous people to be able to access a culturally appropriate service... We have a long way to go... We're a minority within a minority... There is still a lot of discrimination within the gay community, so hopefully that will change one day... That's really frustrating to me... Just working together instead of fighting each other... I think we'd get a lot further..."

Young Indigenous lesbian, metropolitan (via rural) Australia

"I want to stay in Albany and not want to go to Perth, even though my family are there... I want to study to be a naturopath... If I had to I'd move, but otherwise I'd stay here..."

Young bisexual woman, rural Australia

"I hope I'll write my memoir and that I'll be able to find some healing and peace... With my family relationships, maybe I'll find some forgiveness and try to raise awareness of the trans experience... Personally, having a relationship and maybe a family... Seeing the world a bit, travelling, because I've really been working to get to the point where I am now..."

Young trans man, metropolitan (via regional) Australia

"I hope that everyone, regardless of which gender they are, to be able to live fulfilling lives... And regardless, whatever, they are surrounded by people that love them... For me personally I'd like to maybe meet someone who loves me and possibly have a family together... I want to be able to live as me without fear of violence..."

Young intersex person, regional Australia

