

QAGLS Newsletter

April 2018

Ipswich State High Flagship for Diversity

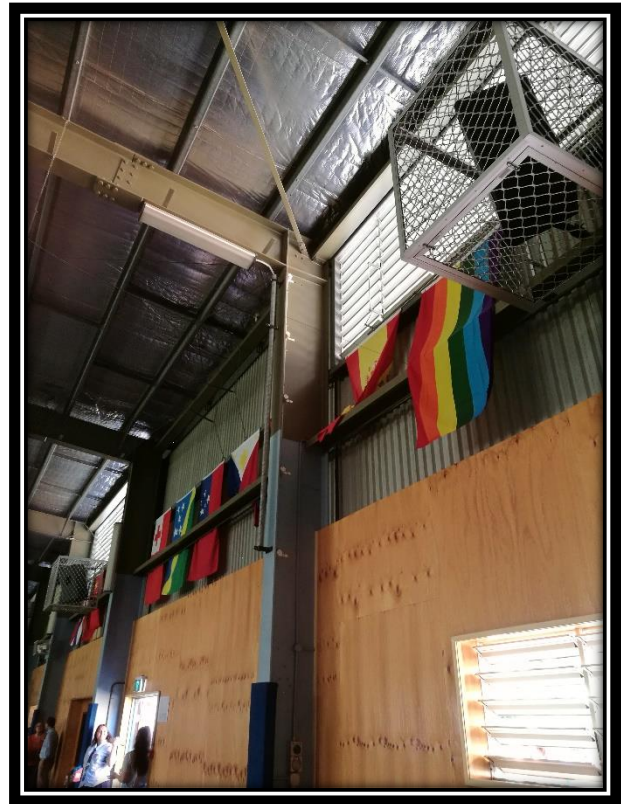
Ipswich State High School has around 1600 students and more than 150 teaching and ancillary staff, from almost 40 different nationalities. On the walls of the main assembly hall, national flags for all students and staff at the school are displayed. The Rainbow Pride flag hangs here as well (photo, right).

The School Principal, Simon Riley, focuses on important matters. Students come to the school to learn; he believes that if they feel safe and welcome, they can focus on their education more easily. At Ipswich State High School, students are provided with opportunities to access support services from a range of school-based and external service providers.

Elements from several national and international programs were combined at Ipswich State High to create the school's 'Wellness Project'. The Wellness Project sets a baseline of understanding about the matters impacting on LGBTI students, among others, to help school management, teachers, and the entire school community.

There is an LGBTIQ+ support group at the school and a student who identifies as pansexual is the representative at school management level.

All it takes to create such an environment is the will and determination of the school principal to welcome ALL students, and allow them to be Free to Be who they are whilst at school.



Collecting the Opinions and Experiences of Teenagers

The Queensland government is making a serious effort to get information about the lives of young people. A new online survey asks anyone aged 13–18 to answer questions about their 'hopes and dreams', 'big issues', and experiences. There are also questions about services and facilities – those that do exist, and those that *should*. And, there are twenty \$50 gift cards to be won.

Participants are asked where they spend their time, and how they feel about their community: whether people show respect, whether the respondent feels safe, and whether they have witnessed or been the subject of unfair treatment. These are obviously crucial issues to LGBTIQ+ students, as well as their friends and families.

The *Growing up in Queensland* project is being run by the Queensland Family and Child Commission. The government should be congratulated on the effort to find out the experiences and opinions of younger people – the test of its usefulness will be the outcomes: providing services where needs have been established.

Please support the *Growing up in Queensland* survey by distributing this information.



Queensland leads the way: Amendment to *BDM Registration Act*

An amendment to the *Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act* allowing those who married as a heterosexual couple to stay married, regardless of any change of gender, has been referred to the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee of the Queensland Parliament.

Introducing the bill, Attorney-general and Minister for Justice Yvette D'Ath noted that the amendment was needed 'to remove a discriminatory and now outdated restriction that applies where a married person is seeking to have the reassignment of their sex noted on their birth or adoption registration.'

Matilda Alexander, President of the **LGBTI Legal Service**, has said that transgender clients in Queensland had been 'faced with an impossible choice between embracing their true gender identity by divorcing their supportive partner or continuing to live under the oppression of an official gender that does not match their identity'. You can **read stories from those directly affected** who spoke at the public hearing on 23 March, and read the **submissions**.

States had been given a year to make changes; it is great to see Queensland leading the country in introducing legislative change to remove discrimination.

Northern Territory Reviews *Anti-discrimination Legislation*

The Northern Territory is conducting a review into its anti-discrimination legislation, and Melbourne's Human Rights Law Centre made three key points in its submission to the review:

- *The need to include protection from discrimination on the basis of sexuality;*
- *The need to remove the permanent exemptions which permit discrimination, replacing them with a 'need to apply' to permit determination on a case-by-case basis;*
- *Introduction of a human rights act or charter of human rights.*

You might be interested in posting...

on the Rural and Regional Queer students' alliance **Proboard site**. The group, which marched in this year's Sydney Mardi Gras parade, has a site aimed mainly at tertiary students. There are threads for groups such as People of Colour, Disability, Bi/Pan, as well as general interest (tv, music, literature, etc.).

The group is also on **Facebook**.

Gender, Sexuality, and Inclusivity: Training Programs for Teachers and Students

Pride and Diversity offers training programs for workplaces, with tailored programs for those in the **health and wellbeing** arenas, **sport** (for state and national sporting organisations), as well as a **three-day training program** for those who wish to prepare themselves to offer programs in their own workplace. The Pride and Diversity program has been embraced across corporate Australia, and now includes all major banks, large government departments, and organisations such as universities.

The **Queensland AIDS Council** (QuAC) offers a range of training packages designed to help health and community services 'build an open and inclusive rapport with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex clients'. For more information email QuAC's Training and Development Co-ordinator, Ricki Menzies, at training@quac.org.au or visit the **website**.

True provides workshops from seven regional centres across Queensland, to help organisations to develop LGBTIQ+ affirming policy and practice. True's **All School Program** offers classes for students and training for teachers, which aim at 'respectful facilitation, free of discrimination and mindful of the diversity that exists in different relationships and families.' Contact the Project Co-ordinator, Gender, Sexuality and Diversity, Nikki Whitmore on nikki.whitmore@true.org.au, (07) 3250 0257, or visit the **website**.

LGBTIQ+ Conversion Therapy: Still Going Strong?

Research 'has shown a disturbing prevalence of gay conversion acts with young people around Australia' says Dr Tim Jones, Senior Lecturer in History at La Trobe University (Victoria).

Dr Jones, a historian of religion who is writing a book about the influence of the Christian right on sexual politics in Australia, said that organisations in Queensland seemed to be 'amongst the most militant' of those who use counselling and other ostensibly 'therapeutic' methods to purge clients of same-sex desire.

The comments come at an interesting period in the history of the collision between the religious right and LGBTIQ+ communities in Australia, the former having led public opposition to same-sex marriage late last year.

Dr Jones is the lead investigator on La Trobe University's research project [Preventing Harm, Promoting Justice: Legal Responses to 'Gay Conversion' Therapy](#), being conducted with Melbourne's Human Rights Law Centre. The project was begun in 2016 as a response to the persistence of 'conversion' in Australia. A report on the research findings is due shortly.

Journalists have picked up on the issue. Farrah Tomazin's "[I am profoundly unsettled": inside the hidden world of gay conversion therapy](#)", recently published in the *Age* newspaper, records her experiences with the Texas-based 'Living Hope' program. 'Living Hope' proposes a vision of '[sexual expression rooted in one man and one woman in a committed, monogamous, heterosexual marriage for life](#)', on the grounds that 'Anything less ... falls short of God's best for humanity.'

Tomazin contends that conversion practices are being 'pushed out through a thriving network of courses and mentors in the borderless world of cyberspace, cloaked in the terminology of "self improvement" or "spiritual healing". Whilst it seems that most online groups are now careful to disguise homophobic views, others are explicit.

Closer to home than Texas, the LibertyInc. group in Brisbane [advertises its belief](#) 'that in the Bible God gives us the only true pattern for living in this world. God's intention is that sexual activity belongs exclusively within the context of monogamous, heterosexual marriage between the two partners in that marriage (Genesis 2:21-24).'

While declaring their organisation does 'not tolerate homophobia or anti-gay vilification,' LibertyInc. 'provides support to those who experience sexual addiction, sexuality problems and unwanted same-sex attraction as well as to families and friends.'

Tomazin's interviews with researchers and survivors suggested that 'Conversion practices are hidden in evangelical churches and ministries, taking the form of exorcisms, prayer groups or counselling. They are also present in some religious schools or practised in the private offices of health professionals'.

Nevertheless, some are prepared to advocate publicly for 'conversion'. During the same-sex marriage debate, Lyle Sheldon defended '[the right of parents](#)' to send children into programs designed to dissuade them from same-sex attraction or identities.

But parental consent can cut both ways: Tomazin's story includes an account of a nine-year-old whose school attempted to dissuade her from transitioning by sending her to 'counselling' sessions without her parents' knowledge. When her parents did find out, they withdrew her from the school.

Dr Jones made the point that professional codes of practice followed by doctors and psychologists do not allow them to practice 'conversion'. It is worth noting, though, that these codes of practice don't apply if someone seeks counselling from a person without these qualifications, who might be operating (for example) from within their church or school, and it is hard to see how they might be enforced with online programs.

For the record, the Columbia Law School report [What does the scholarly research say about whether conversion therapy can alter sexual orientation without causing harm?](#) examined 47 peer-reviewed studies of 'conversion therapy. The report concludes that there is 'no credible evidence that sexual orientation can be changed through therapeutic intervention.' There is, though, ample evidence that such interventions cause psychological damage.



How Professional Are 'Professional Standards'?

Claiming to reflect 'the most ambitious standards possible', [Australian professional standards for teachers](#) have the endorsement of all state ministers of education, and are available on the [Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership](#).

There are four levels – graduate, proficient, highly accomplished, and 'lead' [sic] – which were developed by and through [consultation with 6000 teachers and principals](#).

But these benchmarks for good teaching contain no reference to the special needs of LGBTIQ+ students, although they do require that teachers have the skills to address the needs of minorities. For example, the standards refer to the specific needs of Indigenous students, 'students from diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds', and those with disability.

Developed in December 2017(!), the document for those seeking to lead contains just one mention of diversity, encouraging those who would be school principals to work to '[support the jurisdiction's or school's overall education goals and equity and diversity targets](#)'.

Elsewhere the document promotes leadership and implies the need to be proactive. But this statement on equity and diversity implies the duty to follow, i.e. 'support[ing]' 'goals' and 'targets' set by others. It is to be hoped a more inclusive and more proactive stance, one that would support teachers and principals working towards inclusivity, can be developed in the near future.

Below: Park Benches in Redfern, Sydney.
Thanks to photographer Patricia Simons.

QAGLS: OUR GOALS

1. All teachers and education personnel in Queensland receive training in LGBTIQ+ equity.
2. Comprehensive LGBTIQ+ policy frameworks and guidelines are available in all educational settings in Queensland.
3. Support services and systems for LGBTIQ+ youth are available within and external to educational contexts.
4. Gender neutral and non-binary needs are recognised in all education settings in Queensland.
5. Support for parents and carers of LGBTIQ+ children and young people is promoted within and external to educational contexts in Queensland.
6. Research into LGBTIQ+ equity for students, educational personnel and allies is extended and promoted in Queensland.
7. The work and reputation of the Action Group grows, in Queensland and nationally.

If you have received this newsletter and are interested in finding out about our activities, please contact **Dr Janet Berry**, Chairperson, Queensland Action Group for LGBTIQ+ Students: janet_berry@bigpond.com or 0428 536 618.



Please share this newsletter with family, friends and colleagues, as well as any organisations that might be interested.

