



## QUEENSLAND ACTION GROUP FOR LGBTIQ+ STUDENTS MEDIA RELEASE

The Queensland Action Group for LGBTIQ+ Students sends heartfelt condolences to the family of 13 year old Tyrone Unsworth who took his own life last week after years of homophobic bullying by his peers.

Janet Berry, Chairperson for the Queensland Action Group for LGBTIQ+ Students and a member of PFLAG said “This Action Group campaigns for schools that are safe and supportive for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) students in the knowledge that children’s welfare and lives are at stake.

We do not know the circumstances at Tyrone’s school or how he was bullied. However we know that homophobic and transphobic bullying doesn’t occur only in the playground. The absence of teacher training in diverse sexuality, gender and bodies and the lack of understanding can lead to an unsympathetic approach by some school principals and teachers. This may contribute to LGBTIQ children and young people feeling so marginalised that they resort to self-harm and stop attending school to avoid the dangers they face there.

The Safe Schools Coalition program<sup>1</sup>, funded by the Federal Government, has been on offer to all Queensland schools for more than a year. In Queensland it is delivered by *true Relationships and Reproductive Health*<sup>2</sup> and a significant number of schools have applied for the training available through the program. The program is designed to create safe learning environments for all students and reduce homophobic and transphobic bullying. It provides professional development, resources and support to equip staff and students with skills, practical ideas and the confidence to ensure schools are safe and inclusive for LGBTIQ students, staff and families.

The Queensland Education Department has not made this program obligatory in all Queensland schools. Currently, it is the school principal who makes the critical decision whether their school will join the program. School principals who don’t invite the Safe Schools program into their school need to consider the following facts published by the Australian Human Rights Commission<sup>3</sup> and decide whether they are fulfilling their duty of care to their LGBTIQ students:

- 11 per cent of Australians are of diverse sexual orientation, sex or gender identity (so principals will have a number of these students in their school).

- LGBTI young people report experiencing verbal homophobic abuse (61 per cent), physical homophobic abuse (18 per cent) and other types of homophobia (9 per cent), including cyberbullying, graffiti, social exclusion and humiliation.
- 80 per cent of homophobic bullying involving LGBTI young people occurs at school and has a profound impact on their well-being and education.
- Transgender males and females experience significantly higher rates of non-physical and physical abuse compared with lesbians and gay men.
- Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people are three times more likely to experience depression compared to the broader population.
- LGBTI young people at schools where protective policies are in place are more likely to feel safe compared with those in schools without similar policies (75 per cent compared with 45 per cent). They are almost 50 per cent less likely to be physically abused at school, less likely to suffer other forms of homophobic abuse, less likely to self-harm and less likely to attempt suicide.

The Federal Minister for Education, Simon Birmingham, has indicated that he will not provide funding for the Safe Schools program after June 2017<sup>4</sup>. The Queensland Minister for Education, the Honourable Kate Jones therefore needs to step in to ensure continued delivery of this program in Queensland schools. Queensland should consider following the example of Victoria and deliver the Safe Schools program to all schools.

With research findings that demonstrate the need to support LGBTIQ youth and a training program available for schools, lack of action by the Queensland Government places accountability with the government for the future safety of our children.”

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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## REFERENCES

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2. <http://www.true.org.au/>
3. <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/face-facts-lesbian-gay-bisexual-trans-and-intersex-people>
4. <http://www.senatorbirmingham.com.au/Latest-News/ID/3000/Press-Conference-on-Safe-Schools-resources>