

# SKOOL'S OUT!

**A Report from the Skool's Out Forum  
on Homophobic Bullying and Harassment  
in and around Schools  
2002**





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## **Acknowledgements**

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**Special thanks to Jackie Braw, Margaret Kaye and Vikki Fraser for their efforts in coordinating the Skool's Out Forum and Report.**

### **Acknowledgements**

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Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby

Mogenic.com

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### **Message from the Attorney General**

I am pleased to present the *Skool's Out* Report, prepared jointly by the Crime Prevention Division and the Anti-Discrimination Board.

The *Skool's Out* Forum on homophobic bullying and harassment in schools was a joint initiative of the Crime Prevention Division, the Anti-Discrimination Board and the Department of Education and Training. Held as part of the 2002 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, the forum was a resounding success and won the Mardi Gras Association's award for "Outstanding Community Event". This is the second year running that a joint initiative of the Division and the Board has won this award.

This report stems from a community desire to continue the valuable work commenced at the forum. It contains transcripts of the speeches presented at the forum, a summary of the issues raised during the Panel Discussion, strategies for dealing with homophobic bullying in schools and a comprehensive list of support and referral organisations.

The *Skool's Out* Report demonstrates the ongoing commitment of the NSW Government to reducing violence and harassment experienced by all members of the gay and lesbian community, and the department's continued push to educate and change homophobic attitudes and behaviour in society.

I thoroughly recommend this report as a valuable tool for addressing homophobia in and around schools.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bob Debus'.

Bob Debus



## Introduction

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### ***Skool's Out***

**A forum on homophobic bullying in schools conducted by the Crime Prevention Division of the NSW Attorney General's Department, the NSW Anti-Discrimination Board and the NSW Department of Education and Training.**

#### **1. The purpose of Skool's Out**

The *Skool's Out* Forum aimed to raise awareness about homophobic bullying and violence, discrimination, harassment and vilification in and around public and private schools. The forum's focus was to encourage effective responses to homophobic harassment and violence by students, teachers, parents and schools.

The organisers were acutely aware that young people, teachers and parents who have experienced, or are in fear of being harassed or abused as a result of homophobia, need more support.

#### **2. Background**

##### *Violence Against Gay Men and Lesbians*

Violence against gay men and lesbians continues within the community in many forms, including physical assaults, verbal harassment and intimidation. The *Out of the Blue*<sup>1</sup> survey conducted in 1994 reported that lesbians were six times more likely than other Sydney women to have experienced a physical assault in a 12 month period. Gay men were four times more likely than other Sydney men to have experienced a physical assault in a 12-month period<sup>2</sup>. Fear of violence within the gay and lesbian community was much higher with nine out of ten

surveyed indicating that they were very concerned that they or their friends might be assaulted<sup>3</sup>.

##### *Homophobic Violence in the School System*

Bullying in schools is a problem for many young people. The NSW Department of Education and Training (DET) issued memorandums in 1997, and more recently in 2000, specifically about homophobia. In a national study of the sexuality, health and well-being of same-sex attracted young people, it was found that nearly one third of the participants who were same-sex attracted believed that they had been treated unfairly or discriminated against<sup>4</sup>. Of the total number of participants, nearly half reported they had been verbally abused while 13% indicated that they had been physically abused<sup>5</sup>. Of those who had experienced abuse, it was revealed that 70% of this abuse had occurred at school, indicating that, for those surveyed, the school environment was more violent than the streets<sup>6</sup>.

In terms of educational outcomes, homophobia can cause students to change schools, to perform below their academic abilities and to withdraw from the many informal school curricula relating to social interaction. It may also lead to students dropping out and to mental health problems, including depression and suicide<sup>7</sup>.

##### *Homophobia in an International Context*

Preventing discrimination against children and young people is recognised as a basic human right. Living in an environment free of discrimination is one of the central principles of the United Nation's *Convention on the Rights of the Child (CROC)*. Schools are a social institution and a key factor in realising a government's responsibility to implement the CROC.

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<sup>1</sup> Sandroussi, J. and Thompson, S., 1995, *Out of the Blue: A police survey of violence and harassment against gay men and lesbians*, NSW Police Service, Price Waterhouse Urwick.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> Hillier, L., Dempsey, D., Harrison, L., Beale, L., Matthews, L., and Rosenthal, D., 1998, *Writing Themselves In: A National Report on Sexuality, Health, and Wellbeing of Same Sex Attracted Young People* (internet version), Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

<sup>7</sup> Wyn, J., 1999. *Sexualities and Schools*, *Melbourne Studies in Education*, Volume 40(2), November 1999, Melbourne University.



Principle 10 of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child states:

*‘The child shall be protected from practices which may foster racial, religious and any form of discrimination. He shall be brought up in a spirit of understanding, tolerance, friendship among peoples, peace and universal brotherhood....’*

Article 12 of the CROC, sometimes referred to as the Participation Article, ensures that children who are capable of forming their own views have the right to express their own views freely in all matters affecting them, for example their sexuality and discrimination on the grounds of their sexuality. Children are to be seen as valid participants in discussions or processes that will impact on their welfare. In relation to school processes, this article clearly supports the participation of children in any disciplinary, counselling, suspension or return-to-school discussions.

Article 28 of the CROC specifically covers education. State Governments, in light of their responsibility for education, are required to take measures to encourage regular attendance by students as well as reducing drop-out rates. Homophobia is a significant contributor to gay and lesbian students dropping out of school, yet it is also an issue that can be effectively dealt with by schools. In conjunction with the remaining articles of the CROC, State Governments have a responsibility to address issues of homophobia within schools, particularly as they impact upon the attendance and drop-out rates of gay and lesbian students, but also as homophobia impacts on the basic human dignity of gay and lesbian students.

### *Tackling Homophobia in the School Yard*

The NSW Anti-Discrimination Board (ADB) has been working diligently, along with other organisations like FPA Health, the Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project, and NSW Police, to inform and educate teachers and students about the problem of

homophobia, discrimination and bullying in schools. The ADB approached the Crime Prevention Division (CPD) and the DET to conduct a forum on homophobic bullying in schools as part of the 2002 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Community Events program.

As School Captain, Ms Vanessa Wagner, compere, entertainment personality and gender illusionist, hosted *Skool's Out*, calling together an assembly of students, teachers, parents and other concerned community members. Over 200 people assembled in Marrickville Town Hall in Sydney to participate in a program that provided something for everyone - honesty, humour, an opportunity to vent anger and frustration, information and practical strategies.

The event won the 'Outstanding Community Event' award at the 2002 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Awards night. This is the second year running in which an ADB/CPD initiative has won this award.

### **3. Young people's expectations**

Mogenic.com, a website for queer youth, Twenty10 Gay and Lesbian Youth Support Services, and youth groups from ACON's Fun and Esteem Program gathered feedback from young people about what they expected from the forum. Responses showed young people wanted:

- solutions;
- satisfaction that problems are being addressed;
- the forum to deal with problems in all schools - public, private, religious;
- acknowledgment that awareness needs to be raised at a very young age amongst children - that children need to be educated about homosexuality as a valid lifestyle; and
- a report to come out of the forum.

This report is one step towards meeting young people's needs in relation to homophobic bullying in



## Introduction

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schools. It is intended to be an informative and a practical education tool for students, teachers, parents and schools dealing with this problem.

### 4. *Skool's Out* information brochure

A pocket sized information brochure on dealing with homophobic bullying in schools has been produced for young people as part of the *Skool's Out* initiative. It was produced by the Violence Against Women Specialist Unit, in conjunction with the CPD, the Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby, Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project and the ADB.

Copies of this brochure are available by calling the CPD on (02) 9228 7494 or the ADB on (02) 9268 5555. The text of this brochure is attached at Appendix 1.





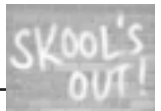
## SKOOL'S OUT

**Tuesday 12 February 2002  
5.30pm Marrickville Town Hall**

### Program

5.00pm - 5.30pm:	Welcome Information Expo
5.30pm - 5.45pm:	Vanessa calls the Assembly to order
5.45pm - 6.45pm:	Speakers     Michelle & Pablo Narelle & Neil Bernadette Julie
6.45pm - 7.00pm:	'Tuck-shop' break
7.00pm - 7.10pm:	Vanessa calls the roll and introduces Bruce Meaghar
7.10pm - 7.45pm:	Questions, Comments, Discussion
7.45pm - 8.00pm	Closing Speaker - Vikki Fraser

**Welcome**



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**Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras 2002**

## SKOOL'S OUT ASSEMBLY

### Forum Report

#### Welcome

In her welcome to participants of the forum, Vanessa Wagner thanked the traditional owners of the land, as well as the organisers - the Crime Prevention Division (CPD) of the NSW Attorney-General's Department, NSW Anti-Discrimination Board (ADB) and the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET).

Vanessa said that the *Skool's Out* Forum was an opportunity to address the concerns of gay men and lesbians in the school system by sharing strategies on confronting the fear and ignorance of homophobic people.



## **Pablo and Michelle's Speech<sup>8</sup>**

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Michelle:

*Barbara Kruger once said, "Do I have to give up me to be loved by you?"*

Pablo:

We feel it's our duty to represent the queer students within our schools, and as part of that obligation we are here to share some of our experiences, struggles, and triumphs in our journey of discovery of our identities and places in the world as queer students and people.

If you didn't get our names from Vanessa (Hi, I'm Michelle) and I'm Pablo.

First of all I'd like to take the opportunity to thank the organisers for having me here today. May I say that I'm honoured to share my experiences that I had throughout high school as a gay student. Whilst I finished my secondary education in 2001, my experiences will still enlighten you on how a young gay student feels and is treated in our schools.

I was always told that my high school years were to be some of the best years of my life. Full of great experiences, they would mark my transition from childhood to adulthood. However, my high school years were some of the worst.

As a child in primary school, I saw myself as 'normal' as the next kid. Don't get me wrong, as a young kid I was always aware of my attraction to other boys, but it was so much a part of me that it was normal to me. It was only at high school and in year seven that I found out I was different. I was gay, a poof, and a fag according to my peers, and it was obviously a bad thing due to the harsh treatment I began to receive. Each day it seemed that the name calling, spitting, and physical violence grew more and more. It was for this reason that I began to foster a great hatred and fear towards school. Whilst everyone else was excited to meet up with friends at school each day, I was scared at what could happen to me, would I be pushed off the bus that morning, or would I be hit by a ball deliberately at lunch time? All because I was gay.

I remember this period of my life as one where I felt completely isolated. I couldn't dream of telling my parents, as I was afraid they wouldn't believe me. And I wasn't even sure myself if I was this thing people called 'gay', and if I was, wouldn't my parents hate me too? The feelings of isolation remained with me for the following years.

During my first year of high school, I realised that the only way to avoid the ill treatment was to become invisible. And that's what I attempted to do. I hid out in the library. All my lunches were spent reading and it was then that I developed a passion for ancient history and mythology. By reading ancient myths of heroes and gods, I escaped from my terrible reality. Somehow I also related to the great men in the stories, and they filled me with hope, that things would get better in the end.

However, it was then that I decided that to be accepted I was going to have to be as great as those heroes, but not by accomplishing great physical feats, rather excelling academically. I decided I would hide and shun that part of me that was gay and wrong and become the best student and son. And so I did, for the next few years I excelled in all areas of my study, receiving numerous accolades. At each presentation there I was receiving some sort of prize for what I had done.

I began to gain friends and they were accepting. But what they accepted was something I put on, it wasn't me, the real Pablo. Whereas, on the outside I put on a brave face of a confident pupil that made everyone laugh, in the inside I felt full of hatred for myself and completely empty. This self hatred that had grown within myself lead me to experiment with harming myself, each attempt getting more daring than the last. The more I got taunted, which still occurred, the more the hatred and harming grew.

It was in Year 10 and in a different high school that all the feelings and experiences I had bottled up since Year 7 swelled and burst, driving me to attempt suicide several times in a single week. If my mother

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<sup>8</sup> The following text formed the basis of a speech delivered at the *Skool's Out* Forum on 12 February 2002. Whilst the majority of the text remains as per the author intended, changes may have been made for editorial purposes.

## Pablo and Michelle's Speech



hadn't found me mixing lethal concoctions from our medicine cabinet then I wouldn't be here today.

I was referred to a youth counsellor, as well as my school counsellor, and from there I set off on the journey of self-discovery, if you will. Through the counselling sessions I became aware of my true self, the "me" that had been hidden so long since that time I decided to shun it to oblivion. Slowly I came to terms with the fact that yes, I was gay, and that didn't mean I was bad or wrong. My self-acceptance slowly came along with a sense of confidence for what I was. It wasn't easy, for all the years of self-hatred and outside violence from others had completely destroyed my self-esteem. But slowly I trotted along, accepting a little of myself every step of the way.

At the commencement of Year 11 I decided that I was still going to excel academically, but not to please everyone else, simply me. It was also in Year 11, one afternoon which I will always remember, one of my friends asked me simply and straight forward, "Pablo, are you gay?" For the first time since I could remember I felt confident enough and said yes, yes I was. From that moment on, all my fears of rejection that had taken up so much of my life began to slowly leave, and my coming out process, as I like to call it, started. I began to tell close friends and made contacts with other gay students at school. While the rumours began to mount on my ambiguous sexuality, I learned not to care what others thought of me, and I did my own thing. Though I still received some harsh treatment, I felt better about myself and took no notice. By the beginning of Year 12 I had conquered that fear of rejection all together and was able to finally tell my mother who I really was and shared with her some of my negative experiences from junior school. Telling my father followed, until most, if not all close family friends knew the real Pablo. I chose to be myself from then on, and if people queried about my sexuality I would tell them the truth- yes, I was a fag, and totally proud of it!

The taunts I now received just bounced off me because they came from younger students and they didn't bother me. What did though was when

younger students received it, as I remembered my experiences. So I attempted to at least be a good role model that showed that yes, you could be gay, and be a good student. I tried to demonstrate to my younger peers that the weakness generally associated with homosexuality was only a myth and that I as a gay person could do anything a straight and 'normal' person could.

Year 12 ended six years of high school in a way I never dreamed of. I had risen to the challenge life in general had thrown at me as a young gay male, as well as facing the roller coaster ride that was the HSC. It wasn't easy, but I succeeded, all the while being 'gay'.

Now looking back on my earlier experiences I see they have made me the person I am today. I believe they have made me a much stronger person, and more sensitive to other people who are deemed different by society, for whatever reason. However I still believe that I did not deserve the treatment I received, nor does anyone else, and I hope that a much more poignant support system for gay and lesbian students is set up within our schools.

By the end of Year 12 when I did, on occasion, receive some taunting, I knew it wasn't me with the problem, but the other person. It took me six years to learn that. I'm now preparing myself to go to university, entering a new stage in my life. Things can only get better from here.

Before I finish, I would like to leave you with a poem that I found in one of my favourite books, Ian Robert's biography, *Finding Out*, as it sums up what I have learnt:

*If you dare to be different and you do not join the crowd,  
if they laugh at your honesty, and taunt you if you're proud  
When they talk of you in whispers and criticise the things you say and do  
Do not fear them but forgive them for they are more afraid than you.*

Thank you.



## ***Pablo and Michelle's Speech***

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Michelle:

Facing up to the fact that I'm a lesbian has been one of the longest and hardest quests I have had to go through in my life. I began the journey in Year 4, at the age of ten, at a private Jewish school in Sydney's eastern suburbs. I guess I've always felt different, but being different was such a normal feeling for me it barely ever struck me as something abnormal.

In the beginning, it was the little things that probably should have been clues. However they just did not register. I had a crush on my Year 3 teacher, but back then I didn't realise it was a crush. Then in Year 4, while I was still attracted to boys, I started to notice girls in a way that I hadn't before, but I tried to ignore it. Then I found the word 'bisexual'. It sounded like the worst thing in the world. How could I ever be bisexual? I mean, I've always been different but this just crossed the line.

I went on like that for about three years. But during that time I stopped being attracted to boys so much and, to my grief, replaced that with girls. To make it even harder, I had never really knowingly met another homosexual other than the one off occasion where I met a really butch 'dyke' or a really camp 'poof' in a shop or restaurant. At school, there was no talk of homosexuality. I don't remember hearing anyone condemn homosexuals, as the philosophy of the school was to accept all people, no matter their beliefs, but I never heard any support of them either. I was fighting the eternal battle completely and utterly alone, with no one to talk to or go to to cry.

One day I decided to tell my best friend. After I told her that I was bisexual, she said that I was just going through a phase, being the normal response. It turned out that she was feeling exactly the same way, but she actually was going through a phase. Her dismissal of my feelings made it even harder to cope. I felt like an alien among my friends. I was going through a rough patch with my only three friends in the school at this point too, which only added to my depression. So many things were going on for me; all I wanted to do was die. I felt suicidal and alone.

Nothing much changed or struck me until a Jewish Studies lesson in Year 6. We were studying the Torah, the Jewish bible and the Old Testament, and were asked to turn to a passage in Leviticus. It said, "You shall not lie with a man as you would a woman. It is an abhorrence".

Even at that age, I was a free thinker and I immediately said to myself that there had to be a mistake in the Torah. How could God exclude people just because of what he made them into? How could anyone use God's name to exclude an entire group?

Then the teacher said, "At this school, we support gays and lesbians because our policy and philosophy is to accept everyone as they are and everyone is equal. I assure you that there are gays and lesbians in the high school". Then I remember thinking, what about the classroom? Why don't I count? I wanted to get up on the table and scream and shout just to be heard, and get it off my chest.

However, I was incredibly lucky because there was an amazing member of staff who helped me through this time. She allowed me to express feelings that I felt no one else would or could understand. She had been through very similar things to what I was going through and gave a non-judgmental ear. In the beginning of Term 3, however, some traumatic events lead to her being questioned very seriously about exactly what we had talked about. It was mostly because of some unrelated events, but I felt that a closer eye was on us because of our common experiences. Having no one to talk to within the school made it even harder to deal with the feelings that were going on inside.

By this time, most of the staff knew of my sexuality and many of my friends at school knew. I came out to the higher staff members of the school, including the Principal, who is here tonight. I had also come out to my parents, which didn't go down too well.

My father was fine with it, but my mother was convinced that I was going through a phase, and that

## Pablo and Michelle's Speech



I would end up being straight after all. Her new role model was Anne Heche, who turned straight and married a man after Ellen. Everyday, she would go on about how she can't wait to have grand children and blah blah blah.

They had also unintentionally found out that my only brother is also bisexual. As you can tell my mother was not at all impressed. But they never tried to tell him to lead a straight life and all the crap that had gone on with me. This still goes on today.

The school was incredibly supportive of my struggle with my family and myself. The counsellor has helped me to understand how my mother was actually feeling and give me some strategies for dealing with her. My year adviser, with whom I had formed a close relationship and become attached to, was one of the most supportive figures at school for me. She was the most amazing person. She listened to everything I had to say and put things into perspective.

I started Year 9 just two weeks ago, and I know it will be an eventful year.

Already, I'm facing people blabber-mouthing my sexuality to the rest of the school.

I was sitting down on the bus a few days ago, joking around with these two boys saying that I was a

lesbian with a girlfriend and all. They weren't supposed to take it seriously, but they did. A few days later the news came to me that they had gone around telling people that I'm a lesbian. This struck me because I'm seriously contemplating coming out to the rest of the school, but I'm just not game enough. So is this my ticket 'out'?

It will be interesting to see how it all unfolds. The people at school are generally accepting, and I have not experienced any direct homophobia yet. I know that if I come out I will be teased and harassed. I probably won't get into any physical assault past a shove or a trip just because the people at school generally aren't violent. Now it's just a case of the waiting game.

I would also like to thank the organisers of this forum. I would never have thought that at only fourteen, I would be standing up here talking about my experiences as a young lesbian. Thank you all so much for hearing what I've had to say. The elation it has given me is immeasurable.

Pablo and Michelle:

We both sincerely hope that if you gain nothing else from this forum, you gain a message of hope from the young queer people who will speak tonight. In our eyes, to sum up our speeches and our view of the message of this forum, a great philosopher once said, "seize the day".





## Narelle and Neil's Speech<sup>9</sup>

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Narelle:

I'm Narelle. Mother of Neil. PFLAG representative. I wondered about Neil's sexuality from about the time he was eight, although he says he didn't realise until he was about 14 or 15 that he was probably gay.

One of my primary school recollections was that the kids in the youth choir to which he belonged mostly called him 'Nigel'. I always saw that as a term of endearment and wondered if they had perceived him similarly.

Neil had the extreme good fortune to have a lesbian teacher in Year 6. None of us realised at the time that she was lesbian. However, she was notable in that she allowed Neil to be himself. His wackiness, his being different, his creativity - was allowed to flourish, it was celebrated. Neil received a class prize at the end of that year. At speech night, I will always remember when she called his name, she was at the podium, he was waiting to walk across the stage to her - they stood there, smiling at each other in the warmest way - I always felt that the palpable feeling transcended the teacher/student relationship.

Neil attended a same sex Anglican high school.

Neil:

I remember in Year 7 or 8, someone I didn't know very well....I was just fooling around and he asked me if I was queer - this done in a derogatory sense. I thought he meant "odd", so I said yes.

Subsequent to that it was a daily issue with certain groups of guys. They were probably the boys who were very involved in the sporting activities and not attracted to the academic side of school life. This was not usually done if I was by myself. To my group they would say things like "Here come the fags" and "Bums to the wall". This was mainly due to the fact that we were all very involved in the choir and drama, orchestra, band and so on.

Narelle:

As it turns out, most of these friends of Neil's are gay, although it was not spoken about at the time - only much later. My feeling was that Neil exhibited good self-esteem when he was at school. He was a very exuberant boy, zany, wacky - actually the quite literal meaning of 'gay'. I really feel for kids who aren't like this - the kids who would take all these taunts to heart. Imagine the isolation they must feel. It would have been so different for Neil without the strength of numbers and the support he felt in this group.

When Neil was in Year 11, the school put on "Guys and Dolls". He had a major role. Keith and I became aware that it had been nicknamed "Guys and Dykes". We wrote to the Headmaster - I think he was unaware of the situation before we wrote. He replied advising he would investigate.

Neil:

Our reaction to these taunts was that it was initially irritating. However, we were a group of about 5 to 10 boys, differing ages, so I coped well with it. We could talk about it and joke about it amongst ourselves. Speaking for myself, it was never something I came home and anguished about in my room. For the last 3 years of high school I started making a larger group of friends in my year, and I became 'the class clown'. So I got away with a lot more wackiness. So for me it ceased to be "Neil is acting like a fag". Now it became "Neil is acting crazy". It never went away. The same homophobic people kept saying the same things day after day. We would retort in a zany way. I think one of our retorts was "Hello sailor!" They just walked away. There were never any physical fights.

One very good example of completely inappropriate teacher behaviour was during a Year 10 Christian Studies class. The teacher told the class that he believed that AIDS was God's punishment upon gays. Whilst, during Year 10 I was not completely sold on myself being gay, you're certainly not going to speak

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<sup>9</sup> The following text formed the basis of a speech delivered at the *Skool's Out* Forum on 12 February 2002. Whilst the majority of the text remains as per the author intended, changes may have been made for editorial purposes.

## Narelle and Neil's Speech



up in class, drawing to the class attention that besides the people who are gay, how about the people in Africa, or drug users who have contracted AIDS. So, it's that whole thing - by not saying anything, people don't think about all the other options.



Another excellent example happened to my friend who was being taunted and was questioned about it by a teacher who had noticed what was going

on. Matthew said: "Oh, it's the usual - look at the poofter - look at the poofter". The teacher's reply was "Well, you're the one doing art!"

The Headmaster had a very strong anti-bullying stance. I felt very safe knowing I could rely on him to support this.

One very good example happened when I was in Year 11. There was a boy in Year 12, when I was in Year 11. He did subsequently turn out to be gay. He was highly involved in choir and had a high profile. Stephen was walking through the playground when some boys started to call out to him in a very effeminate way "Stephen, oh, Stephen...". The Headmaster happened to be there, and witnessed the whole incident. The next morning the whole school was called into assembly. The headmaster spoke about hearing the taunts. He said words to the effect of: Here is a wonderful student who has contributed to the school life in a major way. Bullying of any kind will not be tolerated.

As it transpired, this was about the time that Year 11 boys were lobbying to be made prefects. They hopped on the anti-bullying and non-labelling bandwagon - it was their platform for election to prefectship; apologies were requested and given to boys who had been taunted. It was a ploy to be elected prefect; but it had a very good result in that it was completely adopted by what became that Year 12 and reinforced for the whole of that year.

Narelle:

I always felt that having regard to Neil's fields of endeavour, his arts degree and places of work, that the worst time he would experience would have been his school years. Because it seemed to me that he handled it well, I thought it was strengthening. But certainly not recommended for character building and growing up gay. I want to see children allowed to be themselves, to be encouraged, to know that it is perfectly OK to be different. That everyone has their own unique contribution to make. And to feel secure in this knowledge.

At Neil's high school, there is now a new Headmaster. There is an excellent school counsellor. We are told that a peer support system has been put in place, which is constantly reinforced - there is much work being done by way of videos etc. to educate the boys and reinforcing an anti-bullying stand.

However, regrettably none of this addresses the issue of homophobia. The example of tolerance and acceptance must come from the Headmaster and be reinforced by the teachers.

The Department of Education has excellent resources which can be used to address homophobia. We do not know to what extent these resources are used. Discrimination against disability, against religious beliefs, against skin colour, against race have all been fairly addressed. However, homophobia remains. Why is this so?

Neil:

Modifying attitudes towards homosexuality is one area where schools can assist. Schools cannot change parental attitudes, which are a likely initiator of homophobia, but they can act as a moderating influence. If statistics are to be believed, in a school of 1,000 pupils, 100 of these pupils will be gay.

What influence can you bring to help?



## Bernadette's Speech<sup>10</sup>

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I had to face a dilemma in deciding to speak tonight that serves to illustrate quite well the essence of my experience as a lesbian teaching in Catholic schools. I knew that I wanted to speak, but when it was pointed out to me that I would be 'outing' myself as a lesbian teacher in the Catholic system, I asked for a moment. Actually it was more like an hour and a half. In the end I felt that by not taking this opportunity I was again experiencing a silencing of who I am. An experience that many same-sex attracted teachers and students in all our schools face every day.

I have not had to face vicious verbal or physical attacks. I have not had to face the threat of losing my job. All I have had to contend with is murmurs of "lesbian" in class and while walking across the playground and, overhearing pointed comments between students such as "what do you reckon she'll be wearing to Mardi Gras?"

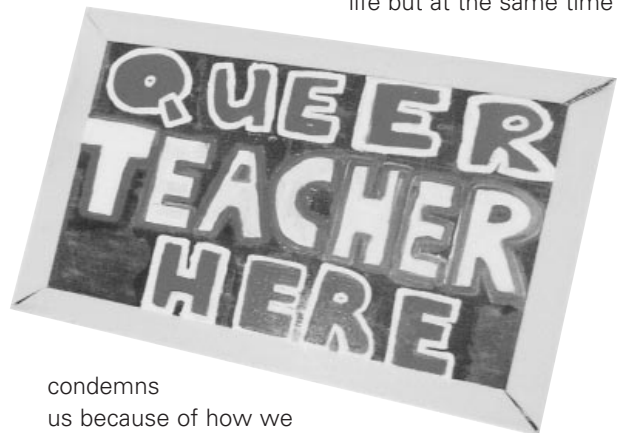
So for me it hasn't been overt hostility but more the subtle coercion that has driven this silencing. Such as the implicit expectation to be discreet:

- a quick goodbye kiss in the morning as your girlfriend drops you at school is not seen in the same light as that same display of affection between heterosexual couples.
- wondering will it be ok to bring my partner to school functions?
- being 'discreet' with students so that you're not seen to be recruiting or advocating a particular lifestyle.

This silencing also occurs very surreptitiously via conversation. Listening to endless staffroom talk of weddings and continuing instalments of many heterosexual scenarios such as the trials and tribulations of relationships with husbands and boyfriends. I often wonder what reaction I would get if I were to bring my own personal experiences and weekend happenings into the conversation. Recently,

it was sad to see a colleague turning up day after day while going through a tumultuous ending of a long-term relationship with her girlfriend and not receive the same outward support afforded to other colleagues who had been through divorces. Then there is the classroom to contend with. Many of you may not be aware that a current derogatory term used by students is 'How Gay' or 'That's so Gay' when referring to someone or something that they find dumb or stupid. They find this harmless talk, however, I find it offensive.

Schools of course are a major social vehicle for perpetuating the dominant heterosexual culture and that prejudice of assumed heterosexuality. However, in Catholic schools same-sex attracted teachers and students have to contend also with the official church line that accepts us out of respect for human life but at the same time



condemns us because of how we want to live that life. Thus, in my work place being who I am can be made more difficult. At school I am consciously selecting the people I come out to. These are either colleagues who are like-minded or who I feel are more liberal and accepting in their attitudes. Just in my first day back at school this year I had three occasions to 'come out'. I was involved in conversations about my studies for this year and the question about the topic for my thesis arose. In two of the conversations I freely explained that I was intending on doing some

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<sup>10</sup> The following text formed the basis of a speech delivered at the *Skool's Out* Forum on 12 February 2002. Whilst the majority of the text remains as per the author intended, changes may have been made for editorial purposes.



gay and lesbian research. And one of these was with a young 'cool' nun.

However, the third conversation went quite differently as this was with the Principal. My reply was more general and I did not mention the gay and lesbian research part. I hadn't yet negotiated how safe it was to 'out' myself to such an authority figure. Developing relationships with colleagues beyond the superficial are continuously navigated on this premise. It is no wonder then that some gay and lesbian colleagues of mine prefer, and find it much easier, to 'keep to themselves'.

A conundrum for me is the hypocrisy I see within the system. The message conveyed is "Yes we know that gay and lesbian teachers are present in our schools but, best we not say anything and better still if they don't bring attention to themselves ". On the one hand we can be embraced as 'good teachers' but in black & white we don't exist, or at best we are classed as the 'others'.

This became evident to me when I read an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* last November. The article reported the endorsement of a clause by the NSW Industrial Relations Commission that allows the Catholic Church to divide leave entitlements, for their employees, between two groups: "Family" (spouses, blood relatives, stepchildren, adopted children and in-laws) and "Others" (de-facto, same-sex and heterosexual partners, who are recognised as families under the NSW law). The comment made by the Executive Director of the Catholic Commission, that the church would ensure all employees had access to leave, irrespective of what relationship they were in, was somewhat heartening. But the qualifying statement of "... we also have a concern to ensure that our view on family and marriages remains an important element of our faith" only serves to highlight the ambiguous nature of the acceptance of and support for gay and lesbian teachers in catholic schools.

Consequently a strong feeling of uncertainty prevails.

A thought that is always in the back of my mind is what level of support would I receive if a student were to go home and pass comment on something Ms ..., the lesbian, said in class. What would happen if my lesbianism became a cause for concern for some parents and they thought that I wasn't fit to be teaching their children? I am sure that the many same-sex attracted teachers in the Catholic system felt apprehensive and nervous when Archbishop Pell's appointment to Sydney was announced last year and many may now feel insecure in their profession. Hopefully we will not see a witch hunt in our schools in the next few years. And it is this that I find so unjust and abhorrent, the fact that my career could be held over my head, not because of my capability as a teacher but because of my sexuality.

At a Mardi Gras party a few years ago I ran into an ex-student and I remember how surprised she was. She could not believe that a teacher from her school days would be the first person that she would bump into at her first Mardi Gras. Actually she became quite overwhelmed when she commented that she wished she had known I was a lesbian back then. It was a nice, positive interaction but more importantly I remember it because it serves to remind me of how unfair and unnecessary it is for students who may be wrestling with their burgeoning sexuality to feel so isolated at school. It also highlights for me the part I could play in trying to make it easier for same-sex attracted teenagers to navigate the ubiquitous rites of passages that are celebrated and taken for granted by their heterosexual peers.

How do we tackle homophobia in schools? I wish I had the definitive answer. The continued implementation of teaching programs within curriculum areas like Personal Development, Health and Physical Education that deal with sexuality, relationships, human rights issues and the formulation of school policies are essential for tackling homophobia. But what is more important to address, I believe, is the hidden curriculum of a school. This hidden agenda is the result of how the curriculum is taught, by whom it is taught and how



## ***Bernadette's Speech***

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the school's policies dealing with bullying, discrimination, and inequality are implemented. It is these underlying and discreet messages which students are attuned to and tend to incorporate into their value system. A school may have all of the programs and policies in place, but they will only be as successful as those implementing them want them to be.

So why do I continue to teach in Catholic schools? Idealistically it may be my attempt at changing a system from within. I was educated in Catholic schools, as I'm sure many of you here tonight were, and I feel that it's possible to make a difference. As a teacher I have the opportunity to broaden the minds of all the students I come into contact with, to widen their experiences, to encourage them to question and to help them find a voice. Most importantly I can help them to accept and value themselves for who they are so that they do not have to feel silenced.

**EXPRESS  
YOURSELF**



As gay and lesbian parents, we face a potential minefield of moral crises and awkward social situations. In the midst of this, our primary responsibility is to our kids, and our biggest job, I believe, is to defend them from shame.

Bullies are attracted to shame like flies to shit - exploiting someone else's internal inadequacy is what they do to feel power in their community.

Bullying, I know a lot about. I was bullied mercilessly by Jamie Shaw, who scared me so badly I took to carrying one of my mother's steak knives to school. "Julie's gay, that's okay, no one likes her anyway", she'd sing, and then threaten to beat me up in the hallway between fourth and fifth period. Looking back, Jamie would have been a 10 on the femme / butch scale; it doesn't take a brain surgeon to figure out the psychology of that situation.

I even had a brief moment of being a bully myself, which was heaps more entertaining than being on the other end of the dynamic. Her name was Loretta, she epitomised poor white trash and was profoundly unpopular, even with the group of outcasts and misfits I hung out with. I have a vague memory of two other girls and I baling Loretta up in the toilets, but to this day my shame is so great that I can't recall details of the event, just the feelings.

I felt, for one brief shining moment, the strong, powerful glow of belonging, of being better than someone else. Obviously, this was after the Jamie Shaw situation, and again it doesn't take a brain surgeon...

Carl Jung once said, "The strongest force in a child's life is the un-lived life of his parent." My experience of being bullied has left me with a passion to protect my children from it, and a long time ago, before I was a lesbian, I decided the most obvious way of achieving this was to raise my kids to be confident, to have a strong, secure sense of self.

Then I fell in love with a woman, left my husband, and found that I had to put my money where my mouth was. I'm not going to tell you that I have any solutions that will work for everyone, but I will share what has worked for me and for my kids, and let you in on a little bit of the interminable lesbian workshopping that we dyke mums engage in at any given chance.

Kids of gay and lesbian parents fall roughly into two groups: those that were conceived in a straight relationship but are being raised in a gay or lesbian household, and those that were conceived mainly by donor insemination within a lesbian relationship, often with the help and support of gay men. Obviously, both groups share some issues, and both face challenges that are unique to them.

My 12 year old daughter and I both agree that a good hunk of the battle is presentation. In her words: "You came out when I was so young, I didn't know that people thought being gay was different, so I just told my friends about it like there was nothing wrong with it."

Two things for parents here: first, tell them when they're young, even before they have the cognition to get it. Second, never let 'em see you sweat. If you as a parent talk about your lifestyle like it was the most pleasant, ordinary fact in the universe, your kids, their friends, and other parents will tend to adopt that attitude. My ex-girlfriend had a Fonzie-like ability to make everything she did seem so cool; for a few years all these little eastern suburbs private school girls wanted nothing more than to be a butch dyke.

Mardi Gras does the same thing in a broader sense: my daughter's friend Rosie confided once, when she was seven, in the car on the way to school, that when she was old enough she was going to find the tallest stilettos she could and dance atop a truck all the way up Oxford Street in the parade. The social kudos my kids got from being in the parade is not to

<sup>11</sup> The following text formed the basis of a speech delivered at the Skool's Out Forum on 12 February 2002. Whilst the majority of the text remains as per the author intended, changes may have been made for editorial purposes.



## Julie's Speech

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be sneezed at. But for those of us who lack the charisma of the Fonz and the Midas touch of Mardi Gras, I believe there are still strategies we can adopt that protect our kids from school-yard homophobia.

Another strategy that has worked well in my family is being heavily involved in the school community. I made myself into one of those obnoxious mums that popped up everywhere. I organised car-pools to and from school, went to every carnival and every concert. I became a member of the Parents and Friends Association and forced them to change the forms from "husband" to "partner". For two years I volunteered a day a month in the tuck shop. I had cups of tea, or in some infinitely preferable cases, bottles of wine with every mother in Leichhardt Council, and talked about my partner as easily as they talked about their husbands, talked about my job at the Sydney Star Observer and my involvement with Mardi Gras as readily as they talked about being fashion buyers or dentists. You may be rolling your eyes, especially at the bit about the tuck shop, but being a lesbian parent is hard work.

Just as importantly, I got to know my kid's teachers. Every year I'd come out to them within the first week of school, and made sure they knew I expected them to look after my kids by not assuming every family has a mom and a dad, by not permitting homophobic comments or jokes from kids or other teachers. I would bring up my "alternative lifestyle" at every parent-teacher conference and ask if they felt my kids were copping any flak for it from other students, or from themselves. This was my way of paving my kids' social path and keeping my eyes on what was happening in their lives when I couldn't be there.

Now, my family faces new challenges: a few years ago, I became pregnant with the help of a clinic and an anonymous donor. My daughter, 9 at the time, was thrilled to tell her friends and, with the help of Kate, the precocious daughter of two doctors,

explained the sticky mechanics of donor insemination to a classroom full of captivated Year 4 girls and their teacher.

I see my task, and that of my community of lesbian mothers with donor-insemination babies, as two fold: first, to use whatever strategies are at hand, including the ones I've just mentioned, to protect her and her peers from homophobic bullying, and secondly, to guard her to the very best of my ability against the social stigma of having no father by giving her the language and the confidence to accept and understand the decisions I made in order to bring her into our lives.

When I heard my 14 year old son explain to my 6 year old nephew why it is not ok to say "I hate gay people, gay people are gross," at the dinner table in front of five stunned and silent adults, I felt like I was seeing first hand the fruits of my labour. But really, this task, for all of us, begins now.





As part of the *Skool's Out* forum, a panel discussion provided people who attended with the opportunity to ask questions of the various government and non-government agency representatives and those from community organisations. Vanessa Wagner introduced the representatives by 'calling the roll' - stating the name and agency of each representative:

1. Chris Puplick, NSW Anti-Discrimination Board
2. Bronwyn Somerville, Crime Prevention Division, NSW Attorney General's Department
3. Kim Proctor, Department of Education and Training
4. Frank Barnes, NSW Teachers Federation
5. Pam Smith, Independent Education Union
6. Michelle Parker, Twenty10 Gay and Lesbian Youth Support Services
7. Liz Hammond, FPA Health
8. Anthony Schembri, Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby
9. Sue Thompson, NSW Police Force Gay and Lesbian Liaison Officers
10. Brad Gray, Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project

Bruce Meagher, facilitator of the Panel Discussion, encouraged people to discuss systemic problems resulting from homophobia, particularly in relation to processes and legislation. He also asked people to offer positive examples of systems or processes that effectively deal with homophobia, as well as positive ways to combat homophobia within schools.

### *Legislative Deficiencies*

John, an Anglican high school student said that a teacher at his school made him feel that his homosexuality was a disease by praying for him to be cured. John pointed out deficiencies in the NSW Anti-Discrimination Act that allows religious schools

to discriminate against gay and lesbian students.

Chris Puplick, NSW Anti-Discrimination Board (ADB), responded to John's comments stating that NSW legislation is defective in that religious schools and institutions are exempt from provisions of the Anti-Discrimination Act, thus allowing discrimination on the basis of homosexuality. He attributed this current stance in legislation to politics. Chris explained that both racism and sexual harassment are prohibited in all schools in NSW, both government and private, regardless of whether certain religions condone such behaviour. Chris said that, in light of this, the NSW legislation was hypocritical by allowing religious schools and institutions to discriminate on the grounds of homosexuality. Chris explained that a long-term aim of the ADB is to facilitate the introduction of legislation to protect homosexuals from all types of discrimination. Chris stated that effective leadership in government was required to honour and protect the rights of individuals.

Pam Smith, Independent Education Union (IEU), also responded to John's concerns. Pam explained the IEU's policy to remove exemptions concerning non-government schools and institutions from anti-discrimination legislation. Pam stated that it was wrong to treat students as second-class citizens on the basis of the type of school they attend. She also affirmed responsibility for the current legislative position that allows discrimination against homosexuals by religious schools and institutions on the political leadership of the State. Pam emphasised that all students and staff should be free from homophobic discrimination, harassment, and vilification.

### *Forced Invisibility of Gay and Lesbian Students*

The mother of a gay high school student commented that it was impossible for students to come out in some high schools. She explained how her son came out while at school and was subsequently socially isolated.



## Panel Discussion

### *Homophobia and Apathy in Schools*

Dominic from Waverley College acknowledged the fact that students cannot come out in some schools, yet the staff at Waverley College knows that he is gay. Dominic commented that as a result of the awareness of gay teachers in schools, there is more education concerning HIV/AIDS for students, and there are anti-homophobia and social justice workshops to educate others. Dominic believes that the problem is that schools do not educate teachers and students about homophobia and homosexuality. Dominic acknowledged the positive change in the culture of some religious schools to understand that discrimination hurts people.

### *Sexuality and Education in Schools*

Vanessa Wagner said that we need to educate children from an early age about the normality of gays and lesbians in society.

### *Education about Homosexuality in Schools*

A Year 11 public high school student, who is a lesbian, stated that the study of homosexuals is only found in the Physical Education curriculum. She said, even then, the content only concerns issues of AIDS, HIV and Sexually Transmitted Diseases. She expressed a desire for positive homosexual role models to speak at schools so that gay and lesbian students feel their sexuality is normal, and so other students are educated about homosexuality and homophobia.

Frank Barnes, NSW Teachers Federation, responded to this comment stating that there is scope within the curriculum of Physical Education to deal with sexuality, but that teachers need to feel comfortable talking about homophobia. Frank explained that there are one-day anti-homophobia workshops for teachers, however, he questioned the length and format of this type of workshop in successfully educating teachers and students about homophobia and homosexuality.

Frank stressed that there is no real support for teachers to enable the effective teaching of anti-homophobia material in schools. Frank also commented that there is a long way to go in relation to this issue.

Liz Hammond, FPA Health also addressed the issue of education about homosexuality in schools. Liz stated that people must act together to fight the problem of homophobia. She explained that FPA runs a program called "Same Difference", which provides training to young people in school presentations on homosexuality and sexual orientation. Liz tried to emphasise the positive work that is being done to address the problem of homophobia in schools.

Michelle Parker, Twenty10 Gay and Lesbian Youth Support Services, also commented on homosexual education in schools, saying that young people remain largely silent while suffering homophobic taunts. Michelle encouraged students and teachers to talk to homophobic bullies to try to determine why they engage in homophobic behaviour. She also suggested that students contact anti-discrimination officers to ensure that schools make use of anti-discrimination policies and legislation.





Bruce Meagher, facilitator of the Panel Discussion wrapped up discussion on this point by saying that we should empower young people to speak up against discrimination, instead of suffering in silence.

### *Anti-homophobia Programs and Rural and Regional Australia*

A woman from Liverpool stated that anti-homophobia education programs do not reach past the major cities into rural and regional areas.

Kim Proctor, NSW Department of Education and Training (DET), acknowledged that it is more difficult to educate people in rural and regional areas about these types of issues. Kim explained that the DET has 46 workers in rural areas to assist addressing issues in schools. She stated that young people need to identify people within their schools who are there to assist them in dealing with homophobia. Kim explained that these Departmental workers can help students to build a network of support to assist them.

### *Lack of Awareness of Gay and Lesbian Support Systems in Schools*

A gay and lesbian educator said that students have a lack of awareness of the appropriate people and support systems available in their schools to deal with homophobia, such as the anti-discrimination officer. She stated that schools are struggling to address many issues, especially those of drugs and alcohol, and homophobia is simply another problem that the school system will not be able to solve.

In response to this, a gay high school student said that he was not aware of who his school counsellor was.

### *Anti-homophobia Poster Campaigns*

Pablo, a former high school student and a speaker at the forum said that an anti-homophobia poster campaign at his school increased the verbal abuse he

experienced at his school and made homophobic attitudes worse. Pablo said he and other homosexual students suffered more taunting from peers.

### *Funding Anti-homophobia Campaigns in Schools*

Brad Gray, Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project, stated that the problem of homophobia is wide spread. He explained that the poster campaign was only intended to raise awareness of homophobia and expressed concern that such campaigns are left to various gay and lesbian community organisations to run. Brad explained that these organisations lack the resources to run such campaigns and suggested that they should be government funded.

Bronwyn Somerville, Director, Crime Prevention Division (CPD) of the Attorney General's Department said that the Department directly supports anti-homophobia projects, such as the *Homophobia: What are you scared of?* poster campaign. Bronwyn expressed the need for a range of training and education programs to address the problem of homophobia. She used the *Skool's Out* pamphlet, which identifies strategies and lists services available to people to deal with homophobic bullying, as an example of the CPD's support for anti-homophobia projects. Bronwyn explained that the Department is also involved in the coordination of government agencies to provide advice and input on policy development and implementation in relation to gay, lesbian and transgender communities. Bronwyn explained that a community advisory group coordinates issues relating to the gay, lesbian and transgender community, but noted that it lacks a youth component. She commented on the need for the Department to have a youth advisory group to provide advice and input on policy development and implementation.

Bronwyn acknowledged Ms Jackie Braw for her work in jointly organising the *Skool's Out* forum, and also for her contribution in her role as Policy Officer (Gay and Lesbian Liaison) of the Attorney General's Department.



## **Panel Discussion**

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### *Homosexuals from Culturally Diverse Backgrounds*

A member of the forum raised concerns relating to homophobia experienced by homosexuals from culturally diverse backgrounds. The member stated that homosexuals from non-Anglo Saxon backgrounds faced a different type of homophobia.

Michelle Parker, Twenty10 Gay and Lesbian Youth Support Services, responded to this concern by stating that she had worked with people on issues faced by homosexuals from culturally diverse backgrounds. Michelle stressed the importance of homosexuals from different cultural backgrounds ensuring their own personal safety by identifying when it is safe to come out and when it is not. Michelle explained that there are gay and lesbian contacts from culturally diverse backgrounds that are

available to talk and support those in similar situations. Michelle requested that members of the audience complete a 'report card' on their school to identify whether or not their school is supportive of homosexual students and teachers.

Bruce Meagher closed the questions, comments and discussion part of the program by thanking the audience and members of the panel for their participation.





Year 7 - a scary time. Plunged headfirst into a new world with no support, no friends. A silent world - an isolated world. Happily for most, this isolation and silence ends. But what about when it doesn't...

For some, isolation, invisibility and silence become the norm throughout their high school lives. I know - I was one of them. Right up until 1999 I lived in a world where I was forced to be silent and unseen. I knew that there was no-one around like me, and more than that, I knew I couldn't say anything for fear of there being no-one.

I was a young woman who was trying to find my place in an intolerant world - the schoolyard. But more than that, I was gay. The fears that I lived with then, I later found were quite common.

I began the process of coming out in Year 10, outside of school. I received a fairly negative reaction. Still I pressed on, and in Year 11 decided to begin the process of coming out to the people at school. In 1999, Year 11, I casually mentioned to my best friend and confidant, Kirk, that he didn't know everything about me. Equally as casual, he responded with "hmm, you're a lesbian - yeah, I'd already guessed!"

About two months after this, I told another person. This was to mark the beginning of one of the greatest tests of my life. Suddenly all the walls of invisibility that I, like many others, had learned to rely on began to dissolve. My school certainly liked gossip, and by the end of the week the entire year group knew. By the end of the year, most of the school knew. I was incredibly hurt by this process. I am a great believer in learning from my experiences, and this one was no exception. The most painful lesson I learnt was that trust isn't always what it seems.

But I also learned a very useful and positive thing. I was very lucky to have gone to the school I went to. While I was scared of it, I was never actually physically hurt. Had I gone to one of the nearby

schools, this may have been the case. It was always high on my conscience that a school in the Campbelltown area was not the best place to identify as a gay woman.

After word had spread I decided that there was no point hiding who I was. As a result, pastoral care group, our equivalent of roll call, became a daily moment of tension in my life, as the teacher began to find me the target of his moods. While it cannot be directly proven, we all felt this was a result of my sexuality, as previously he had been the model of civility toward me.

I was inundated with questions. Things like "How do you know?", "How long have you been...?", "How do you...?", "What happens when...?" - all the usual stuff, but no less discomforting.

Name-calling was rife at the school, with words like 'faggot', 'poof', 'dyke', 'lezzy', and even 'homosexual' being used as insults. It became apparent that while swearing and racism was strictly reprimanded, homophobia was largely ignored.

I remember being both hurt and angry when a young student approached me and asked me if I was a lesbian. When I told him I was he began calling me names, yelling and swearing at me and calling me both unnatural and disgusting. All these things I could handle - you learn to. But when a nearby teacher did nothing but watch...

However, I do realise that in a number of situations, lack of action in the staff did not equate to a lack of caring. I know very well that a large number of the staff care very greatly about our issues and our welfare. But how could a teacher, or for that matter a student, intervene without being labelled as gay? Yes, even in today's world, being a gay sympathiser in a school can often make you the target of abuse and homophobia, and in the case of teachers, it can even result in a lack of respect.

<sup>12</sup> The following text formed the basis of a speech delivered at the Skool's Out Forum on 12 February 2002. Whilst the majority of the text remains as per the author intended, changes may have been made for editorial purposes.



## **Vikki's Speech**

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In late 2000, Kirk, who had also identified as a gay man, came to me with the idea of forming a gay and lesbian support group. With my own experiences, and the things I had noticed about the school environment in mind, I backed his idea wholeheartedly and with him began to write a proposal to give to the school Principal.

We hoped to include all people in our group, staff and student alike. We hoped to provide information. But mostly, we wanted to remove the fear and invisibility associated with being a gay student or staff member, and we wanted to make homophobia a thing of the past.

One of the driving things for Kirk and I has been a desire to make sure young students who are growing up and finding they are same-sex attracted know that a school is a place where they are supported. We also don't want any student to feel alone or isolated as a result of this issue - as we both did.

In the first week of 2001 we went to both the school Counsellor and the Head Teacher of Welfare with our proposal. They both agreed that it was a good idea and a necessary issue, and with their support we went to the Principal.

In those early stages things moved quickly, and two weeks later we had a meeting with the FPA Health team, the Principal, the Head Teacher of Welfare, the Counsellor and the Head Teacher of Physical Education.

The meeting was very positive, but by the end of it, we were all rather sober with the realisation of how much work needed to be done. We needed to be very careful about how we acted, as any community backlash would see a cancellation of our plans. We knew that we would need to make homophobia an issue for school policy.

We formed a committee of four: the Counsellor, the Head teacher of Welfare, Kirk and myself. We met weekly to discuss our aims, and how much had been done. I know sometimes I went to the meetings so

proud of what had been done already, and then be swamped by the looming face of our own personal Mount Everest. We also sought contacts in the community.

The message I sent to the Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), NSW, was forwarded right across NSW, and even to some places outside the state. We received many wonderful messages of support, and many helpful contacts. With advice from the Anti-Discrimination Board, FPA Health and various other groups we began to write programs and devise strategies.

The Department of Education was not beyond helping us either. As well as funding and supporting many interesting and useful kits, such as "Countering Discrimination" and "Mind Matters", they informed us of a funding program specifically to aid in areas like this. Together we discussed and submitted our proposal and request for funding to the department, and were granted \$1000. Part of this money has already been spent on resources. The rest we have set aside to go toward developing and running anti-homophobia programs for both staff and students.

We have received a great deal of support from the Principal and Executive of the school. The Principal has not only supported our proposal, but has allowed the Head Teacher of Welfare time to find and buy materials relevant to our purpose.

One of the most affirming things has been the willingness of both staff and students to support in varying ways. Although homophobia continues to be an issue, we are taking steps to combat this, with the backing of a large portion of the school community.

We have endured times of affirmation, but also moments of frustration. One of the most frustrating things for me has been seeing younger students - those we are working to create a better environment for - being the most homophobic. For me though, this is a potent reminder of the attitudes of the broader community with which we have to work.

## ***Vikki's Speech / Closing Remarks***

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In the future we hope to run training exercises for teachers and students, as well as information seminars for interested members of the community. And yes, we are still working towards creating our support group. Of course, we still have a long way to go.

Despite the snail pace with which 'the group' (as we have unofficially titled our project) has proceeded, and despite the frustrations, I feel that we, even in these early stages, have achieved something the entire school, and the community, can be proud of. Homophobia, and the issue of a school being our place for support as well as education, is now addressed in the school welfare policy.

I stand here today in the middle of a road. If I look behind me, I see a friend coming out, and his marks dropping in one subject as a result. Of course, we cannot officially prove this. I see myself coming out, and the issues associated with that. I see a teacher describing the Mardi Gras as a waste of television programming - a bunch of poofs and dykes prancing around. I see another teacher describing bisexuality as gods test, and if you choose same-sex relationships you've failed and are condemned to hell. I see my ex-girlfriend too scared to even sit next to me at lunch in case someone found out.

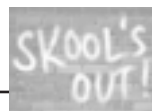
I look at where I am standing, and see the supportive staff and students who have got us this far. I see the changes in school policy. I see teachers and students alike taking a stand against homophobia. I see a strong platform from which to reach out to future year groups, and the community.

And then I look at the road we have left to walk. Yes, it is long. But at the end of it is the support group. At the end of it is a school where homophobia is not condoned or ignored. A school environment which is as supportive in its policy, as individual members of the school community were of my friends and me.

Yes, it will be hard work, but I imagine that with a community backing efforts like these across the state, with the good work of both individuals and organisations, we will get the message across that we all - gay, lesbian, transgender, bisexual, straight, queer, teachers, students, staff, parents and friends - all of us, no matter how we identify, are part of a community which is supportive, strong and successful. I look forward to continuing to be a part of that process, within my school, and the entire community!

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## ***Closing Remarks***



### **Closing Remarks**

Vanessa Wagner closed the forum by thanking the organisers, speakers, invited guests, contributors and participants of the event.



## Feedback

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Two *Express Yourself* scrapbooks were circulated during the discussion session. The following are direct quotes and comments received from attendees about the forum.

1. Do all schools have counsellors?
2. How does DET deal with homophobia in primary school?

*(Note: This question was answered after the forum by Kim Proctor of the NSW State Office of the Department of Education and Training, who says in response to question one, "yes, all schools have access to school counselling services. All government schools have a responsibility to provide a safe and secure learning environment". In response to question two she says, "The Personal Development/Health/Physical Education syllabus in primary schools provides avenues for which homophobia and related issues such as gender construction, rights and responsibilities in relationships and diversity can be addressed. Schools may also take a whole school focus such as a project on anti-discrimination or promoting diversity. Government schools are bound to anti-discrimination legislation and departmental policy which supports this legislation.)*

My experience of working with schools around health issues is that they have a difficult time even addressing less controversial issues such as alcohol and other drugs and general sexual health, so how do we equip schools, and in particular PDHPE staff, to feel confident and comfortable in presenting anti homophobia in the class room.

It's important to keep the focus on those who really need to change.

I owe mogenic.com so much! Everyone should go there! Mogenic Rox!

Wouldn't it be great if everyone acted on their sympathies and actually stood up and boycotted the change?

Assumed heterosexuality drives me mad!!! I hate having to come out over and over again!

Rural schools and communities need urgent attention...seminars, curriculum and workshops to bring the country population up to date with the metropolitan community attitudes.

Really great to see people joining forces to try and abolish homophobia!

Can we start to think about these issues in the context of the broader gender/sexuality regime that insists that queer identities are problems. If we only look at Homo, then we inadvertently contribute to this.

It would be good to address and discuss some of these points in Western Sydney where visibility is a huge issue.

We are here discussing homophobia in schools, discussing discrimination, fear and violence, and yet the only way to combat homophobia, discrimination and promote diversity is through education. This must come through a change in policy, not just the attitudes. At the moment, students are the only ones expressing this within the school system. There must be a 'whole school' approach through students, parents and the community.

No matter the circumstances, you 'must' be the change you want to see in this world we live in!!!

The presence of sexual diversity within the school curriculum must go beyond the secondary PHD component. It needs to be extended to the primary school curriculum!

Being homosexual is OKAY and I am disgusted that schools do not advocate this message because it is WRONG. And to the schools who do advocate that homosexuality is okay I thank you from the bottom of my heart.



A good thing to do would be to have the sexuality section of PDHPE compulsory and include positive references to lifestyles other than heterosexual, not just linking it to drug and alcohol, and sexually transmitted diseases issues.

**MORE BLOODY EDUCATION!!** Our school makes their own PDHPE text books. In the entire book, the word homosexual appears twice and that is in the HIV/AIDS section. The only time we have ever spent on homosexuality was one 50 minute lesson in year 7. More needs to be done in our private schools.

I would like to see this forum during the day with more teachers and students attending. I feel we are preaching to the converted and although this is very cathartic and comforting I don't think it makes the change happen. How do we get these messages, stories etc out into the mainstream community?

I enjoyed the forum. I agreed and disagreed. What would be nice is putting theory into practical use. It still won't stop ignorant people from name calling and gay bashing. That's why we have to grow wise and strong. But remember we are not better because we are different. Everyone's equal not the same. It took this long to see the light. It may take just as long to reach it. Rose need not envy the thorns which are many.

A.K

Just wanted to say thank you for this forum. It's my last year in high school and although it's Chinese New Year and I have relatives over, stuff them!! This concerns me greatly, especially now. But for me this is a great opportunity to get to know more about other services which DO EXIST. Thank you.

To: Department of Education and Training: Why have you forsaken us?

We don't need labels. Why do people judge? Tolerance is cool. Acceptance is fulfilling. Lets establish a philosophical base at all schools. ACCEPT

ALL (culturally diverse inclusive.) Reinforce and explain this constantly.

P.S. well done today organisers. More schools and groups should have been here.

I came here today to learn to be a better teacher. I think that most teachers would do the same. Teachers need support and guidance, this is a good start, but we need more. I congratulate those speakers who have been so open and I know your efforts will not be in vain!

Although the forum was beneficial for me as a student, I found it disappointing that I didn't recognise many other students around me. Ironically labelled 'Schools Out', I think an effort needs to be made in inviting the students of local schools. I was not notified of this through school.

Great experience! Thanks.

An excellent event and forum, well overdue. Happy Mardi Gras!!

It's good to be here. Thank you.

Thanks heaps, do it again!

An excellent idea - great turnout!

CONGRATULATIONS.

Real people, real work, achieving in a difficult area - changing peoples minds. Thanks for the opportunity to hear it.

So far this forum has just been a lot of backslapping. We all know how horrible homophobia in school is, I want to know WHEN CHANGE is going to happen. When will the ADB do something to ensure that anti-homophobia precedents are set in common law so that we don't have to wait for bloody gutless politicians to think "it's an appropriate political time to pass this legislation"??



## Feedback

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In the 10 years since I left high school nothing seems to have changed. I want anti-homophobia curriculum to be compulsory in all schools!!!!

I appreciate the programs that have begun in schools to address homophobia, however, it is problematic that sexuality discrimination falls predominantly within HIV/AIDS education. This perpetuates myths and misinformation and the problematising/pathologising of sexuality that is outside heterosexual definitions.

- start early
- start across all curriculum subject areas
- think widely

Thanks heaps, much appreciated!! Especially your courage, lets stay "out" - Happy Mardi Gras.

My feeling is this...superb work...backslapping? Yes. For a reason? Yes Yes Yes. As more people attend over the years, the more the word is getting out. Thanks.

While I think that the idea of this forum was great, it seems that we are really just talking to ourselves. How many people in attendance were not gay? How many schools sent at least one rep? Because we are just talking amongst our own community, nothing much will come out of this. Honestly, that's just the truth. It seems that all that is happening is people trying to convince each other that everything is good the way it is, or that changes need to be made. But the people here already knew that!

I totally agree with the above, we are preaching to the converted here tonight unfortunately. Where are the principals, teachers, those who we are talking about here who need to be educated and supported in driving change. Is anything at all going to change after tonight.....?

A comment was made that homosexuality is brought up at school in P.E. in conjunction with more negative

issues: drugs, alcohol. In my P.E. at school 2 years ago I asked about homosexuality and my teacher was extremely ignorant and dismissed my question. If homosexuality is going to be discussed maybe a person who is well equipped to deal with problems regarding violence with sensibility.

I think visibility is the big issue, it's not fair to put the responsibility on students wrestling with their sexuality to "build networks" to approach power structures. These spaces should be provided for them! This is the meaning of 'pastoral care'.

Congratulations to the organisers and all involved!

Thank you for the effort put into the organisation of this event.

A big thank you to all the great speakers.

Thanks so much for all of this - very important for us all to have a voice and get things moving.

The organising group has reached its goals! Well done! Well planned! Well executed! You have made a difference! Sleep well.

Congratulations on an outstanding forum. Perhaps an annual review of progress would be beneficial. Well done team! 93/4/10

Excellent forum!! But preaching to the converted - we need leadership desperately.

Well done! Now we need to transport this energy to our politicians. P. G

I loved it. Incredibly worth while. A.P

Very enjoyable and informative. Worthwhile. J.M.

Fabulous forum! Very informative and fun! Thank you. S.D.

Long overdue and highly valuable. Well done! P.D.



One positive comment: I went to a school reunion of a big Catholic School where my two daughters and I both went. Decided to take the bull by the horns and took photos of one daughter plus boyfriend, other daughter and girlfriend. 75 year old mum just says "ok yes dear, we have to look after our gay girls!" Total acceptance from other mums there too. If they can accept so freely, what on earth is the matter with the Pells and Howards of this world? G.M. (PFLAG)

Great day, wish I had heard about it before today. Am a school counsellor and none of us heard anything.

I think being gay is so special. Because of being gay we are forced to open our minds up to many great limits enabling us to be some of the most excepting people in the world. We see the world in such a unique way.

Loved Julie's speech: very practical hints re: parenting - can you put these speeches on the website?

Its times like this I AM PROUD to be who I am, thank you very much xox





## Skool's Out – Where to Now?

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### The report

This report will be distributed as widely as possible to schools, organisations working with schools and other relevant stakeholders. Please contact the Crime Prevention Division or the NSW Anti-Discrimination Board if you would like more copies. Alternatively, the report will also be available on the websites of the Attorney General's Department, the Anti-Discrimination Board and at Mogenic.com. A regular Skool's Out segment to encourage debate, feedback and provide information will also be included on the Mogenic website.

### The pocket sized information brochure

Negotiations are currently underway to distribute these information brochures as widely as possible throughout all schools in NSW. In the meantime, copies are available by contacting the Crime Prevention Division on (02) 9228 7494 or the Anti-Discrimination Board on (02) 9268 5555.

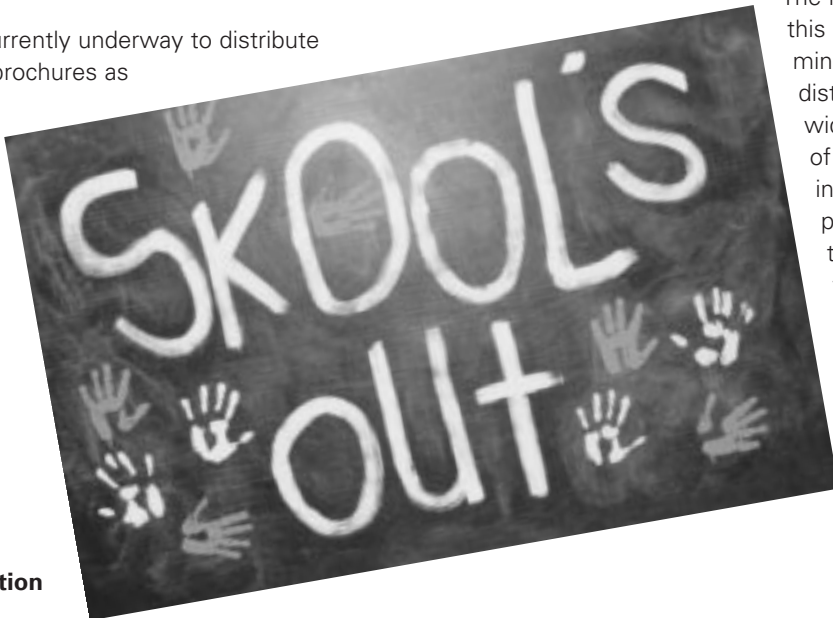
### Ongoing consultation

On 13 March 2002 a consultation meeting, chaired by the Crime Prevention Division, was held to explore ideas to continue the work of *Skool's Out*. The CPD is very keen to continue its commitment to supporting anti-homophobia strategies in schools and to discuss how best to engage young people. Announced at this meeting was a tangible contribution of \$25,000 from the CPD to support sustainable community-based programs linked to the *Skool's Out* initiative.

Amongst the ideas suggested at this consultation were:

- support for teachers;
- resource production;
- support for schools in rural and remote areas;
- consideration of non-English speaking background young people and other marginalised young people; and
- a primary school reader project to introduce gay and lesbian families to young children.

The ideas raised at this meeting were minuted and distributed more widely to a range of stakeholders, including young people and those who work closely with young people. More ideas are currently being gathered.



## Referral and Support Organisations



### Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project (A Project of ACON)

The AVP takes reports of violence from victims and witnesses, refers to other services, provides advocacy where appropriate and develops community safety initiatives.

AVP Report-Line: (02) 9206 2116  
Free Call 1800 063 060  
General Enquiries (02) 9206 2066  
TTY (02) 9283 2088  
Email [avp@acon.org.au](mailto:avp@acon.org.au)

### Gay and Lesbian Counselling Service

Volunteer phone counselling and referral service provided seven nights a week from 4pm to midnight.

Telephone (02) 9207 2800  
Free Call 1800 805 379

### Kids Help Line

A National 24 hour telephone counselling service for children and young people in Australia.

Free Call 1800 551 800  
Website [www.kidshelp.com.au](http://www.kidshelp.com.au)

### Lifeline

Telephone counselling service.

Telephone 131 114  
Website [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)

### NSW Police Force

Many stations in NSW have police who are trained as Gay and Lesbian Liaison Officers (GLLO). To contact your nearest GLLO call the Police Switchboard.

Emergencies 000  
Switchboard (02) 9281 0000  
Police Assistance Line 13 14 44  
Website [www.eagles.com.au/~gllos](http://www.eagles.com.au/~gllos)

### Lesbian and Gay Legal Advice Service (A Project of the Inner City Legal Centre)

Free legal advice to lesbians and gay men. Call to make an appointment.

Telephone (02) 9332 1966 (M-F, 10-6)

### National Children's and Youth Law Centre

Provides advice and information to children and young people, their parents and advocates and the wider community, about young people's legal rights and responsibilities.

Telephone (02) 9398 7488  
Website [www.ncylc.org.au](http://www.ncylc.org.au)

### Twenty10 Gay and Lesbian Youth Support Services

Twenty 10 is an organisation for young gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people who are having problems at home or have become homeless.

Telephone (02) 8585 6300  
Free Call 1800 652 010  
Website [www.Twenty10.org](http://www.Twenty10.org)

### Fun and Esteem (A Project of ACON)

Support and social group for gay men under 26 years old.

Telephone (02) 9206 2000  
Free Call 1800 063 060  
Website [www.acon.org.au/education/youth/main.htm](http://www.acon.org.au/education/youth/main.htm)

### Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby

Campaigns for equal rights for gay men and lesbians.

Telephone (02) 9360 6650  
Website [www.glr.org.au](http://www.glr.org.au)

### PFLAG - Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays

PFLAG is here to give help, support and information to families, friends and all gay people.

Telephone (02) 9899 7013 (for all of NSW)  
Website [www.pflagwestsyd.org.au](http://www.pflagwestsyd.org.au) (has links to other PFLAG groups in NSW)

### FPA Health

Promotes the reproductive and sexual health of the people of NSW.

Telephone (02) 9716 6099  
FPA Healthline 1300 658 886  
Website [www.fpahealth.org.au](http://www.fpahealth.org.au)



## Referral and Support Organisations

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### Telephone Interpreting Service

Interpreting service for people who speak a language other than English.

Telephone 131 450

## GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

### Anti-Discrimination Board

For information or to make a complaint regarding discrimination or vilification.

Telephone (02) 9268 5544  
Free Call 1800 670 812  
Website [www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/adb](http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/adb)

### Attorney General's Department

Has a full-time Policy Officer (Gay and Lesbian Liaison Officer) available to provide assistance on referral and support services. Information is also available on legal rights in NSW for lesbians and gay men.

Telephone (02) 9228 7494  
Websites [www.agd.nsw.gov.au](http://www.agd.nsw.gov.au)  
[www.actsofpassion.nsw.gov.au](http://www.actsofpassion.nsw.gov.au)

### Department of Education and Training

A range of materials and resources are available from the Department of Education and Training. These include:

- Student welfare consultants located in district offices;
- Resources for Teaching Against Violence;
- Mates: HIV/AIDS related education;
- Video: *Out in the Bush*;
- Countering Discrimination - Support Materials for Schools; and
- Talking Sexual Health.

Telephone: (02) 9561 8403  
Website [www.det.nsw.gov.au](http://www.det.nsw.gov.au)

Some NSW schools successfully run anti-vilification/countering discrimination programs and workshops. For information on these programs and workshops please contact:

### Rutherford Technology High School

Mr Paul Yardy Head Teacher of Student Welfare

Telephone (02) 4932 5999  
Fax (02) 4932 8166  
Email [yardyp@rutherfordhs.nsw.edu.au](mailto:yardyp@rutherfordhs.nsw.edu.au)

### Victims Support Line (VSL)

The VSL provides support and referral to victims of crime.

VSL (02) 9374 3000  
Free Call 1800 633 063  
TTY (02) 9374 3000  
Website [www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/vs](http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/vs)

## WEBSITES

[www.stophomophobia.org](http://www.stophomophobia.org)  
Information on homophobia and related violence.

[www.youth.lightheaded.org](http://www.youth.lightheaded.org)  
Peer support listings for young GLBT people.

[www.mogenic.com](http://www.mogenic.com)  
Website for Queer Youth. Website contains information on the *Skool's Out* initiative.

[www.reachout.asn.au](http://www.reachout.asn.au)  
Developed in response to youth suicide rates, Reach Out! provides much-needed information, assistance and referrals for young people.

[www.bi.org.au](http://www.bi.org.au)  
Website for bisexual community of Australia.

[www.womens.gateway.nsw.gov.au](http://www.womens.gateway.nsw.gov.au)  
Women's Gateway: Government and community services for women.



### OTHER RESOURCES

#### Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society Resources

Telephone (03) 9285 5124

Fax (03) 9285 5220

Website

<http://www.latrobe.edu.au/arcshs/>

The Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health, and Society Resources has developed a range of resources on sexuality, sexual health and associated issues. These include:

*Talking Sexual Health: A National Framework for Education about STI's, AIDS and Blood-borne Viruses in Secondary Schools;*

*Talking Sexual Health: A Professional Development Resource for Training Teachers;*

*Talking Sexual Health: A Parent's Resource;*

*Talking Sexual Health: A Teaching and Learning Resource;*

*Safety in Our Schools: Strategies for responding to homophobia;*

*Writing Themselves In: A National Report on the Sexuality, Health and Well-Being of Same-Sex Attracted Young People;* and

*'It's Just Easier': The Internet as a Safety-Net for Same-Sex Attracted Young People.*

### FURTHER READING

Barbeler, V., 1992, *The Young Lesbian Report*, The Young Lesbian Group.

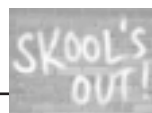
Bennet, R., *Young and Gay*, 1993, Twenty-Ten Gay and Lesbian Youth Services.

Gilbert, K., 2000, *Yes You Are: A guide to educating young people and adults about healthy relationships, sexual diversity and anti-homophobia*, FPA Health.

Jean M. Baker, PhD, *How Homophobia Hurts Children: Nurturing Diversity at Home, at School, and in the Community*, Harrington Park Press, NY.

National Children's and Youth Law Centre, *Know Your Rights at School*. Contact (02) 9398 7488 for copies.

### References



Sandroussi, J. and Thompson, S., 1995, *Out of the Blue: A police survey of violence and harassment against gay men and lesbians*, NSW Police Service, Price Waterhouse Urwick.

Hillier, L., Dempsey, D., Harrison, L., Beale, L., Matthews, L., and Rosenthal, D., 1998, *Writing Themselves In: A National Report on Sexuality,*

*Health, and Wellbeing of Same Sex Attracted Young People* (internet version), Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University.

Wyn, J., 1999, *Sexualities and Schools*, Melbourne Studies in Education, Volume 40(2), November 1999, Melbourne University.



# Appendix 1 - Schools Out Information Brochure

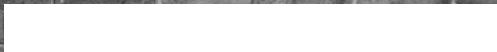
## WHO ELSE CAN HELP ...

Gay & Lesbian Counselling Service of NSW: 02 9207 2800 or 1800 805 379  
 Kids Help Line: 1800 551 800  
 Lesbian & Gay Anti-Violence Project: 02 9206 2066  
 Lesbian and Gay Legal Advice Service  
 (at the Inner City Legal Centre): 02 9332 1966  
 Gay & Lesbian Rights Lobby: 02 9360 6650  
 2010 Lesbian & Gay Youth Services: 02 9552 6130  
 Fun & Esteem groups at ACON: 02 9206 2000 or 1800 063 060  
 PFLAG – support for parents and friends: 02 9294 1002  
 National Children's and Youth Law Centre: 02 9398 7488  
 NSW Anti-Discrimination Board: 02 9268 5544 or 1800 670 812  
 NSW Police Service Gay and Lesbian Liaison Officers: 02 9281 0000

## WEBSITES ...

[www.stophomophobia.org](http://www.stophomophobia.org)  
 (information about homophobia & homophobic violence)  
[www.youth.lighthouse.org](http://www.youth.lighthouse.org) (listing of peer support for young GLBT people)  
[www.girl.org.au](http://www.girl.org.au) (Gay & Lesbian Rights Lobby)  
[www.mogenic.com](http://www.mogenic.com) (website for queer youth)  
[www.reachout.asn.au](http://www.reachout.asn.au) (information & referral service for young people)  
[www.det.nsw.gov.au](http://www.det.nsw.gov.au) (Department of Education & Training)  
[www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/adb](http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/adb) (NSW Anti-Discrimination Board)  
[www.lawstuff.org.au](http://www.lawstuff.org.au) (National Children's & Youth Law Centre)  
[www.eagles.com.au/~glfos](http://www.eagles.com.au/~glfos) (Police Gay & Lesbian Liaison Officers)  
[www.actsofpassion.nsw.gov.au](http://www.actsofpassion.nsw.gov.au)  
 (information about legal rights in NSW for gays & lesbians)

## Other useful contacts:



## FURTHER READING:

*Know Your Rights at School* (National Children's and Youth Law Centre), contact 02 9398 7488 for copies  
*Young and Gay* (1993) R Bennet, Twenty-Ten Gay and Lesbian Youth Services  
*The Young Lesbian Report* (1992), V Barbeler, The Young Lesbian Group  
*The Schoolwatch Report* (1993), J Griffin



This brochure has been compiled from information available on the [www.stophomophobia.org](http://www.stophomophobia.org) website and fact sheets distributed by the Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby (2002).



## Your school is a sorry place if it allows bullying and hassling people who are gay, lesbian or same sex attracted (or who are thought to be gay, lesbian or same sex attracted).

Homophobia means the fear or hatred of homosexuality. Homophobia is a big problem in schools. Many schools are now accepting of young gays and lesbians and it is quite common for students to be out at some high schools. Some schools value all students and positively promote acceptance.

A school which provides a safe learning environment for straight students but does not make sure gay and lesbian students are protected from bullying is acting against the law.

If you're bullied or hassled it might be what is called vilification. To vilify someone because they are gay or lesbian might mean using words or doing things in public to stir up hate or serious ridicule. In many situations, vilification is against the law.

**Talk to the Anti-Discrimination Board for free advice on 1800 670 812.**

Homophobic violence is against the law too. It is a crime and the police will act against those who do it. Other forms of

has a School Discipline Policy or Code which should state that the school does not allow discrimination, harassment, bullying, intimidation or violence. This includes homophobic.

## NON-GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS ...

Every non-government school should have a policy about violence and harassment. They should also have a special person you can go to for help, or you can always go to your Principal.

Private schools are not covered by the same anti-discrimination laws as government schools. Vilification law does apply to all schools.

## BULLYING CAN MEAN DIFFERENT THINGS ...

If you're bullied, hassled or called names at school this could be discrimination. Unfortunately, discrimination is still common at some schools. This can include discrimination by teachers, name-calling, harassment and bullying by students as well as teachers. Discrimination is against the law in NSW. It is against the law if you are treated unfairly by a school or teacher just because

- you are gay or lesbian (or thought to be gay or lesbian), or
- your parents, friends or other family members are gay or lesbian.

bullying including threats and damage to property are also crimes and therefore against the law.

Schools aim to provide a safe, caring environment for all students. Part of a teacher's duty of care includes contributing to a safe environment for learning, for all students.

## GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS ...

Government schools have been reminded recently in official policy that homophobia is not welcome in schools and that high schools need to address the problem of homophobic bullying. They should have anti-discrimination contact officers and provide information and education about homophobia. Every government school

## HOW TO DEAL WITH BULLYING ...

### 1. Approach people at your school first.

You could talk to:

- your classroom teacher
- other support teachers
- your Year Adviser
- the School Counsellor
- Anti-Discrimination Contact Officer
- Head Teacher, Welfare
- Deputy Principal
- Principal.

There are also staff at the District Office who can help:

- Student Welfare Consultant
- Student Services and Equity Coordinator.

Your District Office phone number is in the phone book under Department of Education and Training.

**2. Try to stay calm and cool – be fair and respectful of others.**

### 3. Try the Triple-A approach:

**Assert** – tell them to stop bullying or hassling you.

**Avoid** – walk away from them and don't let them provoke you.

**Affirm** – remind yourself that you're just as good as anyone else if you are attracted to people of the same sex.

**4. If you see another student being bullied, stand up and support them.**

Say that bullying is not on. Ask other students to support you and the person being bullied. Everyone gains from having a hassle-free time at school.

### 5. Try the 3 step approach:

**Name it** – name the behaviour you see eg. "you're just bullying him/her".

**Claim it** – say how it makes you feel and how it makes others feel eg. "I don't like that, and no one else does either".

**Stop it** – tell the bully what you want to happen eg. "So, stop it".

There are many other things you can do to make your school a better place for everyone. For more information about how you can help build a better school, go to [www.stophomophobia.org](http://www.stophomophobia.org) and other contacts listed on the back page of this brochure.

## Appendix 2 – Practical Ideas for Schools



Appendix 2 - Some practical ideas to promote equity and acceptance

### *In the classroom*

- Encourage relevant discussion around same-sex attraction.
- Do research projects on famous gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender people or characters.
- Integrate same-sex attracted issues and anti-homophobia education within and across the Personal Development/Health/Physical Education curricula and relevant subject areas.

### *In the staff room*

- Revise teaching programs to ensure they are not passively homophobic or heterosexist.
- Revise student welfare policy to make sure it is inclusive of same-sex attraction/anti-homophobia, and make this policy known to the entire school community.
- Encourage staff not to impose their personal values and attitudes on young people. Teachers should provide opportunities for students to examine their own values and attitudes so that they also understand how this influences the decisions they make and the way in which they behave.
- Ensure staff are comfortable in confronting questions/problems that will arise from anti-homophobia campaigns. Workshops for teachers can be run in order to assist in raising awareness and sensitivity.

### *Within the school community*

- Work with the Student Representative Council to involve students in the development of programs addressing all forms of discrimination.
- Encourage staff and students to challenge homophobic language and behaviour in and around the school. Ways of challenging homophobia should be discussed at staff meetings and in classrooms to ensure effective strategies are

adopted and that students and teachers are safe when challenging homophobia.

- Encourage the use of language inclusive of same-sex attraction, for example, using the word partner instead of husband or wife. Acknowledge and be inclusive of all types of families including, for example, same-sex parents.
- Initiate staff and student discussions about the negative impact that homophobia has on young people, and strategies to counter homophobia within the school community.
- Display anti-homophobia poster campaigns around the school in prominent areas. Contact organisations that run these campaigns such as the Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project. Make sure there is follow up if posters are displayed to ensure it does not encourage victimisation. Posters need to be displayed as part of a broader program.
- Display positive images of lesbians, gay, bisexual and transgender people in a range of family situations.
- Ensure there are library resources that include same-sex attraction in a positive way, including fiction and non-fiction.
- Access expertise within the community such as Police Gay and Lesbian Liaison Officers and incorporate them into an ongoing education program that addresses same-sex attracted issues and homophobia.
- Write anti-homophobia articles for your school newsletter/newspaper. It may be an idea to run this article for a special event, for example World Human Rights day.
- Include school activities and excursions during Pride Week, Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras etc.
- Utilise existing Department of Education and Training resources that deal with homophobia.
- Provide students, teachers and parents with



## Appendix 2 – Practical Ideals for Schools

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information about how to deal with homophobic treatment, for example, complaining to school management or the Anti-Discrimination Board.

- Find, review and update existing school harassment or bullying policy to include a statement about homophobic language and behaviour in the context of the school's values of social justice and respect for the individual.
- Find out about successful strategies taking place in other schools, and try and adapt or incorporate them for your school.
- Acknowledge the diversity among students, including a range of sexualities. Promote diversity as something to be celebrated not just tolerated.

- Do not assume that all students, staff and parents and their friends are heterosexual. Constantly assuming that people are heterosexual makes people of alternate sexualities feel invisible.
- Involve parents in the school commitment to providing a safe and inclusive school community.

These ideas have been inspired by and adapted from the brochure, *Small Changes Huge Impact*, developed by FPA Health.

