

Article for Man2Man

'Proud Schools' Show The Way – Outright Youth Submission

In Tasmania as in the rest of Australia bullying of 'gay' students is leading to significantly higher incidence of self harm and suicide amongst students. Probably the most startling statistic is that young people who have been physically abused because of their attraction to the same sex are three times more likely in urban areas and 6 times in rural areas to think about harming themselves.¹

Advocacy by the Tasmanian Outright Youth, a peer group program managed by students themselves, has led to commitments from the Education Minister regarding their request for uniform resources in all Tasmanian public & private schools including:

- Allocation of a 'safe space' in schools
- Appointment of a GLBTI contact teacher/social worker
- Provision of the Australian Human Rights Commission resource "Not Round Here" Manual, as well as other freely available resources
- Encouraging a peer support structure in schools for students requesting assistance

Action by the Tasmanian Department has been slow, despite the Minister's commitment, and it has not so far allocated any resources to implement the Outright request. This is a major concern to Outright Youth as there is very little infrastructure in any schools to support LGBTI youth in Tasmania. Traditional programs like Pride & Prejudice have not been built into school infrastructure and are too readily identified by religious fundamentalists. The benchmark of Tasmania *Together*, for Teachers to receive anti-discrimination training, has fallen well behind the targets. An Outright Youth review of all high schools in the State reveals that the existence of LGBTI cultural awareness training is at a very low level. These are of major concern when anecdotal evidence and case studies show the bullying problem is at a high level in many Tasmanian rural schools, with the higher than average incidence of self harm and suicide.²

Meanwhile a government program, 'Proud Schools' to tackle homophobia in high schools, that is set to be rolled out across New South Wales, is very similar to the Outright Youth submission for Tasmania. This inspired approach followed a number of tragic suicides in the State including the death of Kadina High School student Alex Wildman, who was found dead in the garage of his Lismore home. Two days earlier, months of harassment by other students culminated in Wildman being struck in the head while two other boys held his hair and a group of students looked on. The NSW Government \$250,000 dollar pilot program aims to fight abuse and negative attitudes faced by gay teens, and will be implemented at 12 schools in Sydney, the Hunter

¹ (Howard, J. et al, Same Sex Attracted Youth in Mental Health Promotion and Young People: Concepts and Practice. 2002. Eds Rowling, L, Martin, G., Walker, L. McGraw Hill, Australia)

² Rural SSAYP are six times more likely to attempt suicide than the population as a whole (Quinn, K., Rural Youth and Same Sex Attracted Youth: Issues, Interventions and Implications for Rural Counselors. Rural and Remote Health. 2003 Vol 3.)

region and on the Central Coast. The NSW Government hopes that the 'Proud schools' program will later be taken on at all high schools across the State. The New South Wales Education Minister, Verity Firth, says that research shows that 20 per cent of gay high school students experience physical abuse because of homophobia. The program will involve a number of activities at the schools, including professional development for teachers and student and parent workshops.

Outright Youth State Co-Coordinator, Joshua Brown, called on the State Government to implement a similar program in Tasmania and to link it to the recently announced State Suicide Prevention Strategy³, which has an emphasis on developing strategies for the GLBTI population given their experience of victimisation, marginalisation and the fear of discrimination which can lead to psychological stress, self harm, anxiety, depression and suicide. Joshua stated that "the words are fine, but the action is not forthcoming". He added that "it is unfair to leave all the responsibility to teachers and students to cope without resources and training".

Joshua Brown
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³ Tasmania's Suicide Prevention Strategy 2010-2014 A Strategic Framework & Action Plan Dec 2010, Statewide Mental Health Services DHHS