

23 October 2009

Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth
PO Box 6021
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

<p><u>Submission No. 30</u> (Youth Violence) A.O.C. Date: 27/10/2009</p>

Dear Committee Member

Submission to the inquiry into the impact of violence on young Australians

Please find attached ACON's submission to the inquiry into the impact of violence on young Australians. We hope this submission will be informative and considered by the Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth.

'*You shouldn't have to hide to be safe,*' a report produced by the NSW Attorney-General's Department, showed that just under half of the lesbian respondents reported abuse in the past year.

The NSW Police Service *Out of the Blue* study demonstrates a similar pattern and found that in Sydney, lesbians were six times more likely to be assaulted than other women. In addition, the report found that 90% of gay men and lesbians, compared with 56% of the general NSW population were 'concerned' that they or their friends would be assaulted.

ACON's is pleased to make a submission to this important Inquiry, and includes thirteen (13) recommendations for consideration by the Committee.

Yours sincerely

Nicolas Parkhill
Chief Executive Officer

equality ● empathy ● partnership ● community ● diversity ● courage





BUILDING OUR COMMUNITY'S
HEALTH & WELLBEING

Submission to:

House of Representatives Standing
Committee on Family, Community,
Housing and Youth inquiry into the
impact of violence on young
Australians.

October 2009

Extract from a Report made to ACON's Anti-Violence Project:

Location of Incident – suburb → Darlinghurst

Location specification → Oxford Street

Type of Incident → Physical assault

What happened →

Victim was walking along Oxford Street (after leaving the Oxford Hotel and en route toward the Midnight Shift) when four men attacked him from behind near a convenience store. Victim was first hit in the back of the head. He stumbled forward and was then hit again. Victim fell over and, in a state of shock, picked himself up and tried to retaliate. He was then attacked again and perpetrators bashed him unconscious.

What was said by the perpetrator(s) → “Take that, you f**cking poofter”

This extract comes from a report of the brutal bashing of Sydney man Craig Gee in Darlinghurst, made to ACON's Anti-Violence Project in December 2007. ACON's Anti-Violence Project receives around 100 reports of violence, harassment and bullying annually.

This incident, and others like it, sends shockwaves through the Australian gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) communities. While this incident is an extreme example, homophobic violence, bullying and harassment occur in varying ways and in a variety of settings – in our schools, on our streets, on line, and even in our homes.

The impacts go beyond those for the individual and reinforce for many the need to dress differently, behave differently and for some, may serve as an additional barrier to 'coming out'. For the GLBT community, the fear of violence, bullying and harassment is real; particularly because **85 percent** of people in our community have experienced some form of homophobic violence.

These are the reasons ACON makes this submission.

About ACON

ACON (formerly known as the AIDS Council of NSW) was formed in 1985 as part of the community response to the impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Australia. Today, ACON is Australia's largest community-based gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) health and HIV/AIDS organisation. ACON provides information, support and advocacy for the GLBT community and people living with or at risk of acquiring HIV, including sex workers and people who use drugs.

ACON is home to the Lesbian Gay Anti-Violence Project (AVP), the Community Support Network (CSN), the Positive Living Centre (PLC) and the Sex Workers Outreach Project (SWOP). ACON has its head office in Sydney as well as branches in the Illawarra, Northern Rivers, the Hunter region and the Mid North Coast.

ACON has two youth specific projects, *Fun and Esteem* working with young same-sex attracted men up to the age of 26, and the *Young Women's project* working with young same-sex attracted women up to the age of 26. These two projects use peer education to educate and support young people to improve their health through harm minimisation strategies and building personal resilience.

The Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project

The Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project (AVP) initially started in 1991 as a result of the report *Streetwatch* published by the Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby in 1990. Since 2000, the AVP has been a part of ACON.

The AVP maintains a Violence Report Line in order to monitor levels, locations, and types of violence being experienced by members of our community. The Report Line receives an average of 91 reports annually, although for some years, this number has been as high as 145 (2004). Approximately 20% of these reports are from women and 80% from men. Verbal abuse accounts for the largest number of reports to the AVP (340 incidences), however harassment/intimidation (223) and physical assault (205) reports were also reported in very high numbers.

The AVP provides support and referrals for victims of violence related issues, including:

- One-off incidents and ongoing abuse
- Verbal and/or physical abuse
- Domestic violence in same-sex relationships
- Homophobic abuse and violence within the family
- Service providers seeking support and information

The AVP delivers an annual average of 500 individual occasions of services relation to support and referrals for victims of violence. In addition to individual support and advocacy to improve the outcomes for victims, the AVP works to address the underlying causes of violence by:

- Developing anti-homophobia public education initiatives
- Promoting anti-homophobia education in schools
- Educating the GLBT community about keeping safe, including providing self defence classes

- Lobbying relevant authorities for better services for our community
- Working closely with police, government and community organisations on a range of violence prevention initiatives

General Comments

Violence experienced in the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) community continues to be higher than violence experienced in the general community. According to a report by the NSW Attorney General's Department, 85% of the GLBT community in NSW have experienced homophobic abuse, harassment or violence in their lives.¹ Furthermore 56% of the GLBT community in NSW have experienced homophobic abuse, harassment or violence in the past 12 months.² A large National study into same-sex attracted people reported that 44% experienced verbal abuse and 16% experienced physical abuse.³

Given this unacceptably widespread experience of violence in the GLBT community, it is no surprise that members of the GLBT community also feel less safe. In the NSW Attorney General's Department's report, *You Shouldn't Have to Hide to be Safe*, 46% of lesbian respondents reported that they felt '*less safe than most other women*', and 65% of gay men felt less safe than most other men. For respondents aged between 20-29 years, almost three quarters reported feeling less safe.⁴

In the context of an evidence base indicating high rates of violence perpetrated against the GLBT and same-sex attracted youth, ACON consulted GLBT and same-sex attracted young people in three locations to allow same-sex attracted young people to discuss their experiences and thoughts about violence. In October 2009, 39 young people were consulted in three locations across Sydney to provide specific input to this submission. Some of their stories appear later in this submission. This is in addition to ACON's broad expertise in almost 25 years of working with the GLBT community, including through the AVP and youth projects.

Concern about violence against GLBT and same-sex attracted people exist across the general community. Both community based and mainstream media outlets have reported on these issues, highlighting the significant level of community concern about these issues (See attachments A and B for recent media articles).

Violence Against Same-Sex Attracted Youth

Violence against gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth in Australia still occurs in a context of homophobia, discrimination and prejudice. Young people are particularly vulnerable to homophobia because they often do not yet have the skills or resources to remove themselves from harmful situations. This can be particularly damaging if homophobic abuse is experienced in multiple environments, such as at school, at home and in the street. This leaves no safe place for same-sex attracted young people, leading to a much more complete form of isolation and causing a state of fear. In fact, settings where

¹ NSW Attorney General's Department, *You Shouldn't Have to Hide to be Safe*, (2003), p. i.

² *Ibid.*

³ L Hillier, A Turner, A Mitchell, *Writing Themselves In Again: 6 years on The 2nd national report on the sexuality, health & well-being of same sex attracted young people in Australia*, Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health & Society, La Trobe University, Melbourne, (2005), p. 35.

⁴ NSW Attorney General's Department, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

violence can occur are diverse, including in education institutions, at home, in the street and on the Internet.

The context of discrimination and prejudice is also a barrier for same-sex attracted young people in accessing services. This is of particular concern if they perceive that figures of authority are homophobic or do not care about homophobic abuse, for example their teachers, their counsellors or their religious leaders.⁵

The violence same-sex attracted young people experience can include verbal abuse, bullying, harassment, physical abuse and sexual abuse. Verbal abuse is the most common form of homophobic abuse, it can include name calling, insults, threats and rumour spreading.⁶ Much of this abuse is upsetting to the victims and is perpetrated by other students.⁷ Physical abuse can include damage to a person's property, bodily harm, rape, often resulting in hospitalisation and even sometimes death.

Young people who identify as or are perceived to be gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender fear violence due to their sexuality or gender identity at very high rates.⁸ A report from the NSW Attorney General's Department found that young people were particularly concerned about the relationship of violence and their appearance. Some young people "agreed that the amount of abuse experienced from strangers has a lot to do with how visible an individual is as lesbian or gay. Someone who fits a stereotypical image will be 'more visible' and thus more vulnerable to abuse."⁹

*'So much is about how we look. What does a lesbian look like?'*¹⁰

The report also commented:

'However, one participant pointed out that whilst you can select your clothes in the hope of being safe from homophobia, there are many things about your appearance that you cannot change so easily. Another suggested that lesbians and gay men are always having to weigh up the cost of violence against the cost of losing their sense of self'¹¹

The figures from ACON's AVP presented earlier in this submission highlight the enormous impact violence and other homophobic behaviours have on same-sex attracted young people. This work within ACON receives very little support in terms of funding. ACON has experience in partnering with other organisations to prevent violence as well as providing psychosocial support for victims of violence in our community. This experience and ACON's unique placement makes ACON a perfect partner for government to deliver properly funded initiatives in this important area. Attachments C, D and E provides a few examples of the AVP's resources.

⁵ L Hillier & A Mitchell, *Why Homophobia needs to be named in bullying policy*, Australian Research Centre in Health, Sex and Society, La Trobe University, at <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/ssay/assets/downloads/Homophobic%20bullying.pdf> (accessed 19 October 2009).

⁶ L Hillier, A Turner, A Mitchell, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁸ L Hillier, A Turner, A Mitchell, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

⁹ NSW Attorney General's Department, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

In Education Institutions

A total of 74% of respondents to *Writing Themselves in Again* who have suffered abuse experienced at least one incident at school.¹² For respondents aged 14-17, the figure increased to almost 9 out of 10.¹³ The experience of violence in schools was mirrored in a report from the NSW Attorney General's Department in 2003, with participants expressing:

'People in high school were the worst'

'There was very overt bullying in my school'

'There was this graffiti that said "X is a lesbian. Beware"'

*'I got lots of harassment, at a boys' Catholic school. I got spat on, ball bearings thrown at me, names engraved on the wall, work graffitied on. A boy above me had committed suicide and the assumption was that it was because of homophobia. The school counsellor said: "Don't come out."'*¹⁴

In the consultations conducted by ACON, schools were also raised as a location of homophobic violence:

'At school I think it's a really big thing, homophobia at school. Being picked on for being effeminate, it affects you. You ask "is there something wrong with me? Why can't I be the way I am?'

- Penrith consultation participant

Violence against young people can occur in many different forms. The impact of verbal abuse, bullying and harassment are just as serious as physical and sexual abuse. The subtleties of violence in the school environment can include socially isolating an individual, which can cause lasting mental health issues.

'When I did come out, like I pretty much felt ostracised afterwards. I would see these people fairly regularly before, and when I did come out... one guy who I was friends with didn't even shake my hand'

- Penrith consultation participant

Physical abuse was also present in schools. 15% of respondents to *Writing Themselves in Again* experienced physical violence, a majority in schools.¹⁵ *Writing Themselves in Again* identified the school toilets was a site for homophobic violence:

'School – Daily bashing, taste testing of the urinals or making sure people's shit was the right colour'

- (Kevin, 17 years)¹⁶

'I was cornered in the school toilets and three guys took turns punching the shit out of me'

- (Tristan 18 years)¹⁷

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹⁴ NSW Attorney General's Department, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

¹⁵ L Hillier, A Turner, A Mitchell, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

Other areas of the school were also sites of homophobic violence:

'Pushed down the stairs and into a wall at high school'

- (Tori, 20 years)¹⁸

'One guy threatened to kill me and I found that I had to stop going out in case the person was there! They were very abusive and I know that the person would bash people up for no reason at all! This guy and his brother both sorta pushed me around and ruined yr9[sic] and yr 10 for me!'

- (Tyron, 16 years)¹⁹

'My bed at boarding school was pissed on. I was subjected to other guys pretending to have sex with me. Broomsticks inserted in my anus.'

- (Hugh, 21 years)²⁰

Although there are very obvious forms of prejudice based violence in school settings, there is an inconsistent response from staff and the school community. Young people talked about teachers ignoring homophobic abuse and not taking it as seriously as they would racist or sexist abuse.²¹ There is a perception that some teachers will help, but that it is out of the norm and going beyond the call of duty to do so.

'Teachers just ignore it... clearly gay remarks, [teachers] just ignore it or let it [go] by, don't even stop it. They seem to ignore it and don't acknowledge it unless they're forced to.'

- UTS consultation participant

'At school I had one amazing teacher, she was there, she put me on to the counsellor, it was up to the teacher who went beyond her job.'

- Penrith consultation participant

Teachers often do not have the skills to be able to address homophobic violence the same way that they can address racist or sexist violence. However, it may also be the case that teachers may share homophobic attitudes or fear being stigmatised if they "stick up" for same-sex attracted young people, especially if not supported by school policies.²² Participants at the UNSW consultation commented that "*Teachers don't know how to handle it*" and suggested that training was required for teachers and counsellors.

The impact of violence, harassment and social isolation can create an environment where homophobic violence is acceptable or even expected. This can lead to more violence and abuse as well as an escalation of violence and abuse. Some students who do not hold these views may internalise the homophobia and perpetrate homophobic violence due to peer pressure.

When homophobic violence is perpetrated within the school but not addressed by the school, this can lead to an elevated fear for GLBT students that it may happen to them next. For example, the homophobic environment at school lead to feelings of "anger" and

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 38

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 38

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 40, Penrith consultation, UTS consultation, UNSW consultation

²² L Hillier & A Mitchell, *op. cit.*,

“anxiety” in a consultation participant.²³ The fear of homophobic abuse can often lead to many people hiding their sexuality.²⁴

‘I did feel the pressure, “like a ton of bricks” to sleep with women. It just got too much, it was hard, it was really difficult.’

- Penrith consultation participant

For many, schools are a safe environment to learn, develop and be themselves, and this also should be the case for same-sex attracted youth. This is particularly important because same-sex attracted youth may face homophobia, rejection and violence at home, in religious institutions or in the community. Schools often can be the only place of refuge.

At Home

Violence at home can come from parents, siblings, relatives and/or partners.

Incidents of violence from parents were more rare. Two incidents were reported in *Writing Themselves in Again*:

‘My father and stepmother... believed that I wouldn’t be gay if they knocked it out of me, quite literally used to slam my head against the wall, gave me a headache, but I’m still gay.’

- (Miriam, 19 years)²⁵

‘Got smashed by my dad.’

- (Owen, 15 years)²⁶

Verbal abuse from family members were also reported:

“‘You fucking faggot” – from my brother

- (Keith, 20 years)²⁷

‘My dad went psycho at me when I yelled it to him in an argument, it was the only way I can tell him.’

- Penrith consultation participant

Although abuse from family members is reported to occur less frequently than abuse from elsewhere, the impact is much more significant. What family members say or do is often more hurtful and upsetting.²⁸ Furthermore, for many same-sex attracted youth, their family and their home is not an environment that they can avoid or escape from due to the fact that young people do not have the economic or social capacity to safely move out of home.

Also it is evident that fear of violence associated with sexuality also impacts same-sex attracted youth in the home.

²³ Penrith consultation participant.

²⁴ 70% in an Victorian study hid their sexuality at school, W Leonard, A Mitchell, S Patel, C Fox, *Coming Forward: The underreporting of heterosexist violence and same-sex partner abuse in Victoria*, Australian Research Centre in Health, Sex and Society, La Trobe University, (2008), p. v.

²⁵ L Hillier, A Turner, A Mitchell, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

'Fear of violence in their family if they come out to their family.'

- Penrith consultation participant

Young people in relationships may also be at risk of domestic violence from their partners.²⁹ Research shows that the level of domestic violence is similar to heterosexual relationships, however certain aspects such as the threat of outing, and the fear of discrimination in services distinguishes same-sex domestic violence from other forms of domestic violence.

Street Based Violence

In a report from the NSW Attorney General's Department, almost one third (29%) of the most recent incidents of violence occurred in the street.³⁰ In a national study on same-sex attracted young people, almost half experienced violence in the street.³¹ Street-based violence can include both physical and verbal violence.

'My partner and I were displaying affection to each other, some guys noticed that and some started abusing us. We jumped in a car, and they also jumped in their car and three cars pursued us. When we stopped at red lights, they would jump out and kicked and trash our car. [We] called police but they were ineffective, we felt isolated.'

- UNSW consultation participant

'I was victimised on the bus, some guy next to me, started making comments, physically grabbing me, shaking me, screaming vitriol in my face. Ended up with the bus physically being stopped. I wasn't doing anything, only my appearance was enough to provoke something life threatening.'

- UNSW consultation participant

'I was at the world youth day protests, and a pilgrim attacked me. I made it on the news and that's how my mum found out I was gay.'

- UTS consultation participant

The case of Aaron and Greg was widely reported in the gay media. Aaron (21) and Greg (27) were attacked by a group of men with bottles and metal poles, calling them "fucking faggots".³² Aaron "spent two weeks in Blacktown Hospital with a fractured skull and bleeding on the brain. He could not walk or talk, had migraines, ongoing vomiting and intense sensitivity to light and noise."³³ Aaron was subsequently diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder and is still recovering from the physical and psychological impacts of the attack.³⁴

ACON and the Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby (NSW) conducted a community forum regarding the review of the *Charter of Victims Rights* by the NSW Government in August

²⁹ W Leonard, A Mitchell, S Patel et al, *op. cit.*, p. 45; ACON, *Fair's Fair: A snapshot of violence and abuse in Sydney LGBT relationships 2006*, p. 13.

³⁰ NSW Attorney General's Department, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

³¹ L Hillier, A Turner, A Mitchell, *op. cit.*, p. 39

³² *Sydney Star Observer*, (25 August 2009), at <http://www.starobserver.com.au/news/2009/08/25/gay-basher-walking-free/15492>

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*; ACON and Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby (NSW) Charter of Victims Rights community forum, (26 August 2009).

2009. Aaron and Greg, along with other community members attended this forum. The forum participants highlighted the creation of fear and concern in the community that share the identity of Aaron and Greg, an identity for which they were attacked for.

Hate crimes can also cause lasting physical as well as psychological harm to young people, especially during a period of their lives when they may be confused and stressed about their own identities.

Hate crimes have a chilling effect not only on the victims, their family and friends, but also on the entire community who's identity was the basis for the attack. Hate crimes committed against same-sex attracted young people have contributed to many young people living in a state of fear and concern for their safety. In ACON's experience, there is widespread acknowledgement that the fear of homophobic violence is always felt, and this is often manifested in them modifying their behaviour to what they think is the "norm".

'Can't underestimate how big that [fear] is, your relationship is actually being affected by the invisible threat of violence.'

- UNSW consultation participant

'I always get nervous, ingrained modification of behaviour.'

- UTS consultation participant

'I still can't go to a Penrith Panthers game. I feel scared. I don't want to put myself in a situation where someone who knows I am gay is going to be there.'

- Penrith consultation participant

'I rejected [public] displays of affection. I always have to be conscious.'

- UNSW consultation participant

The right to safety of young people is a right that should not be compromised due to sexual identity. ACON's position is that public safety includes individuals being safe whilst being who they are. Safety that only exist if same-sex attracted young people have to pretend is an illusionary safety and still causes fear and stress for these young people.

Cyber Bullying and Harassment

The emergence and popularity of internet based communication such as social networking sites (Facebook, Myspace, Twitter etc.), internet chat programs (MSN Messenger, Yahoo Messenger, Google Chat etc.) and email have lead to increased opportunities for the perpetration of homophobic abuse on the internet.

Cyber bullying can cause significant mental stress, especially if it is continued over a significant period of time and/or multiple individuals are targeting the victim.

'In year 12 when I came out, we had a web forum. If ever I mentioned I found a guy attractive, it was like "go and do it in your own thread [discussion space]". Small things that kept going. It was run by year 12 students, it wasn't something that you can take to the school.'

- UNSW consultation participant

Cyber-bullying often occurs without any supervision from adults, and online forms of communication are often not moderated adequately to remove homophobic threats, vilification or incitements to violence.

Homophobic abuse on the internet can also incite or result in homophobic violence being perpetrated beyond the internet. The Anti-Discrimination Board in NSW has “warned that statewide violence is being fuelled by an increasing number of homophobic websites run by Australians.”³⁵

Impacts of Violence on Same-Sex Attracted Youth

Apart from direct impacts of violence, the experience of verbal and physical abuse significantly decreases the feeling of safety for same-sex attracted youth.³⁶ A report from La Trobe University states that having experienced verbal abuse or physical abuse dramatically increased the likelihood of self harm, in a sample of 1750 same-sex attracted youths, having experienced verbal abuse doubled the likelihood of self harm, and having experienced physical abuse tripled the likelihood of self harm.³⁷ This is consistent with much higher numbers of attempted suicide and self harm reported for the GLBT community³⁸ when considering the higher levels of violence experienced by the GLBT community.

‘When so many people tell you how disgusting you are, you start to feel disgusting and at many times in my life, I know I have wanted to turn my back on the person looking back at me in the mirror. When it got particularly bad I used to scratch patterns in my face until it bled out of disgust for myself.’

- (Aiden, 19 years)³⁹

‘I tried to kill myself because I was so badly teased at school for being a lesbian.. it never ended and I got severe depression and I saw no other way to be happy, I was in hospital for 2 months trying to control my depression and because doctors thought I would hurt myself again if they let me out and it also forced me to drop out of school.’

- (Claudia, 16 years)⁴⁰

Violence against same-sex attracted youth also has an impact on drug and alcohol use, with a significant increase in the rate of drug and alcohol use for same-sex attracted young people who have experienced verbal abuse and even higher rate of use for those who have been physically abused.⁴¹

This submission has already mentioned the impact of violence in creating fear, and the constant modification of behaviour by same-sex attracted youth to avoid violence.

The impact of homophobic violence and fear of violence can result in physical harm, social isolation and psychological harm. These factors can also lead to depression, suicidal ideation, self-harm and suicide.

³⁵ Sydney Morning Herald, *Websites fuel hate crimes*, 15 June 2009

³⁶ L Hillier, A Turner, A Mitchell, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

³⁸ Suicide Prevention Australia, *Position Statement: Suicide and self-harm among gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender communities*, (2009), p. 2.

³⁹ L Hillier, A Turner, A Mitchell, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 44

Strategies and Responses to Reduce Violence and its Impacts

Data collection

The vast majority of data collection at both the national and state level does not include sexuality indicators, making it very difficult for researchers and policy makers to consider the evidence for, and design programs in response to issues affecting GLBT and same sex attracted populations. This gap in the evidence base exists across health, criminal justice and other portfolios relevant to this inquiry.

Also the collection of homophobic abuse and hate crimes reported to state police are not all recorded or reported to a national authority.

Although research and studies conducted outside of policing have provided some insight into violence against Same-sex attracted youth, having statistics from police jurisdictions across Australia in relation to hate crimes would present a much fuller picture. Statistics can then thus be analysed and provide future directions for policy.

Recommendation

1. All routine and one off national data collections should include a sexuality indicator to address this unacceptable gap in the evidence base.
2. All Governments implement data capture strategies to accurately record and report statistics to the Australian Institute of Criminology, and for the AIC to be funded to analyse and publicly report this information.

National Strategy

As this submission has pointed out, the scale of homophobic violence is widespread and is causing significant physical and psychological harm. While ACON is aware of the NSW Government's strategy to reduce violence in the GLBT community (*Working Together: Preventing violence against gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people*), there is currently not a consistent approach in addressing homophobic violence at a national level. In many cases, there is not stated plan for reducing such violence.

General approaches to crime prevention and anti-violence programs are welcome, however given the gravity of the impact, specific focussed attention is required to reduce violence against GLBT people.

Leadership from the Commonwealth Government in the context of crime prevention and social inclusion is necessary for coordinated action in this important area.

Recommendation:

3. That the Commonwealth Government develops and funds a strategy to reduce violence against the GLBT community and the impact of such violence.
4. That new and existing crime prevention, social inclusion and other relevant strategies and programs identify the GLBT community as a priority group.

In Education Institutions

Much of the homophobic violence that occurs in schools and many examples of street-based violence are perpetrated by young people between 20 to 29 years.⁴² This makes schools key institutions for reducing violence against Same-sex attracted young people.

Educational settings are critically important in the development of attitudes and beliefs of young people. The recognition of early life transition points experienced in adolescent years can fundamentally affect young peoples' views about themselves, as well as others in the community.

Schools need to create a safe environment for same-sex attracted youth. This can be facilitated by the development of a clear, well understood (by staff and students) and enforced policy around anti-homophobic violence has been identified as necessary by many consultation participants. This can be in the form of an anti-bullying policy that covers GLBT specific abuse, or a specific policy that targets GLBT related abuse.

'Policies for schools, should be followed up and enforced.'

- Penrith consultation participant

'There should be negative consequences for perpetrators doing the actions. They're the ones that need to be scared.'

- UTS consultation participant

Training for teachers and staff is key in ensuring that staff can identify and address homophobic attitudes and/or violence, as well as to provide support to students who have experienced homophobic violence.

By teachers and schools setting an example that homophobic abuse is not acceptable, this will challenge some of the views held by perpetrators and abusers. The school curriculum is another area in which prejudices can be challenged and examined so that diversity and inclusivity are supported and encouraged. Many young people consulted by ACON wanted GLBT issues to be covered in a range of classes including personal development, health and physical education (PDHPE) and history. By presenting the existence of GLBT people and the positive contributions they have made, it can provide affirmation to the student that is depressed about his/her sexuality as well as to discourage homophobia.

'Teach in history, there are same-sex attracted people in each every era.'

- Penrith consultation participant

Recommendations:

5. The Commonwealth Government consider gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender issues in the development of a national curriculum.
6. The Commonwealth Government requires schools to have anti-homophobic abuse policies in place and for schools to enforce these policies. These policies can be GLBT specific or as a part of an anti-bullying policy.
7. The appropriate inter-governmental committees consider a range of actions that can serve to reduce violence and homophobic attitudes toward GLBT people.

⁴² NSW Attorney General's Department, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

8. The Commonwealth Government provide leadership in this area by funding a national youth based anti-homophobia education campaign and cooperating with the State and Territory governments through the appropriate intergovernmental committee.

Anti-Discrimination

Violence against same-sex attracted youth that are motivated by discriminatory attitudes and prejudices need to be challenged. The Commonwealth Government has an opportunity to clearly state that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity is not acceptable in Australia by passing legislation to that effect.

The current gap in anti-discrimination protections suggest that although the Commonwealth Government considers it inappropriate to prejudice people on the grounds of race, sex, disability and age, it is acceptable to prejudice people on the grounds of sexuality and gender identity.

A federal anti-discrimination law should also prohibit vilification and harassment to directly address the verbal abuse, bullying and harassment that is experienced by same-sex attracted youth. Such a mechanism would allow an opportunity for young people to not accept the abuse that is committed and challenge the abuse.

Any federal anti-discrimination legislation need to apply to all schools (public and private) given the importance of the school environment in social and emotional development and the necessity to ensure a consistent anti-homophobia message to all young people.

The government now has an opportunity to build on the same-sex reforms passed earlier this year to legislate for full equality for same-sex relationships. Participants felt that it was important for the Commonwealth Government to affirm that same-sex attracted youth are of equal worth and value and therefore deserve the same rights as their heterosexual counterparts.

'We need same-sex marriage, currently it implies that we are less than and are not equal to heterosexual people. People see that is the case, people will think it is ok to bash or verbally abuse gay people. Once same-sex marriage is allowed, it will have an impact for kids in schools. I think it will be a big helpful affirmation.'

- Penrith consultation participant

Recommendations:

9. The Commonwealth Government passes legislation prohibiting discrimination and vilification on the grounds of sexuality and gender identity.
10. The Commonwealth Government passes legislation that legalises and recognises marriages between two adults regardless of sex or gender.

Services

A number of services are required for victims of homophobic abuse to assist them in preventing, escaping and recovering from abusive situations.

Programs that visit schools to discuss issues of sexuality and violence can assist in students placing a real person to the victims of violence and the consequences of homophobic abuse. This can also normalise the existence of same-sex attracted youth and assist in changing homophobic attitudes and prejudices.

Services that provide support for same-sex attracted young people through counselling, group therapy, capacity building and emergency housing are currently underfunded and cannot provide services to all those who need it. To ensure that the negative impacts of homophobic abuse are minimised, support services are crucial.

Recommendations:

11. All Governments prioritise the provision of prevention programs and support services to reduce homophobic violence and the impact of homophobic violence against young people.

Cyber Bullying and Harassment

As more and more communication and social networking happens online, there is a need for education about the internet safely and providing services that can assist in addressing cyber-bullying.

Recommendations:

12. The Commonwealth Government fund services that educate young people about internet safety.
13. Given the rapidly increasing popularity and reach of social networking internet sites, the Commonwealth Government prioritise the funding of services that address cyber bullying.

List of Recommendations

1. All routine and one off national data collections should include a sexuality indicator to address this unacceptable gap in the evidence base.
2. All Governments implement data capture strategies to accurately record and report statistics to the Australian Institute of Criminology, and for the AIC to be funded to analyse and publicly report this information.
3. That the Commonwealth Government develops and funds a strategy to reduce violence against the GLBT community and the impact of such violence.
4. That new and existing crime prevention, social inclusion and other relevant strategies and programs identify the GLBT community as a priority group.
5. The Commonwealth Government consider gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender issues in the development of a national curriculum.
6. The Commonwealth Government requires schools to have anti-homophobic abuse policies in place and for schools to enforce these policies. These policies can be GLBT specific or as a part of an anti-bullying policy.
7. The appropriate inter-governmental committees consider a range of actions that can serve to reduce violence and homophobic attitudes toward GLBT people.
8. The Commonwealth Government provide leadership in this area by funding a national youth based anti-homophobia education campaign and cooperating with the State and Territory governments through the appropriate intergovernmental committee.
9. The Commonwealth Government passes legislation prohibiting discrimination and vilification on the grounds of sexuality and gender identity.
10. The Commonwealth Government passes legislation that legalises and recognises marriages between two adults regardless of sex or gender.
11. All Governments prioritise the provision of prevention programs and support services to reduce homophobic violence and the impact of homophobic violence against young people.
12. The Commonwealth Government fund services that educate young people about internet safety.
13. Given the rapidly increasing popularity and reach of social networking internet sites, the Commonwealth Government prioritise the funding of services that address cyber bullying.

For further information regarding this submission, please contact Karen Price, Director, Policy, Strategy and Research, on 9206 2048 or email kprice@acon.org.au.

The Sydney Morning Herald

News and Features

Gays in fear of straight drunks

Alexandra Beech

425 words

8 August 2009

The Sydney Morning Herald

SMHH

First

13

English

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MEMBERS of Sydney's gay community are restraining their behaviour and appearance during Mardi Gras and other events because they fear violence from drunk straight men.

A report released by the Australian Institute of Criminology this week said people travelling to and from Sydney's public gay and lesbian events were going in large groups, using private transport, visiting areas with larger gay and lesbian populations and remaining alert at all times. They were also avoiding showing affection towards their partners and not wearing make-up or extravagant clothing.

"I hate myself for being like this, but I'm reticent about showing too much affection to another man in public when heading to or coming home from the party," one respondent said.

"After the [Mardi Gras] parade there is a lot of abusive and sometimes violent behaviour from (to generalise) drunk straight men, which makes me as a woman feel uncomfortable and unsafe," said a woman. "So I am always alert for this and try to avoid such people and walk away from the parade with friends and with the crowd rather than being on my/our own in a quiet street."

Forty per cent of respondents said they had witnessed hostility or abuse, with nearly 10 per cent having witnessed six or more such incidents.

"Mardi Gras parade seems to be getting more and more aggressive after the glitter settles," another woman said. "Drunk people (in my experience, young men), who are interested in provoking lesbians and gay men for sport."

A male respondent said: "A group of straight youths were picking on single males in the post-parade crowd and landing martial arts-style flying kicks to their head and kicking them while down on the road."

Robyn Plaister, who was arrested in the first Mardi Gras parade in 1978, said the violence had shifted from attacks by police to attacks by straight men.

"At the first Mardi Gras it was because the police were violent," she said. "Now the violence is more from young adolescents on the streets ... It's been probably their entertainment for the end of the evening when they're a bit drunk."

Superintendent Donna Adney from Surry Hills Local Area Command said many homophobic crimes went unreported.

"The percentage of homophobic violence reported is a very small part of the total crimes reported to police," she said. "There has been historically a reluctance to report some crimes by members of the gay and lesbian community."

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Sickening gay-hate crimes

Up to 35 attacks in NSW a month as homophobic websites fuel violence

BY MATTHEW BENNS

A 27-YEAR-OLD civil servant watched in horror as his gay partner was smashed across the back of the head with an iron bar after they were ambushed on their way home from their local RSL club last month.

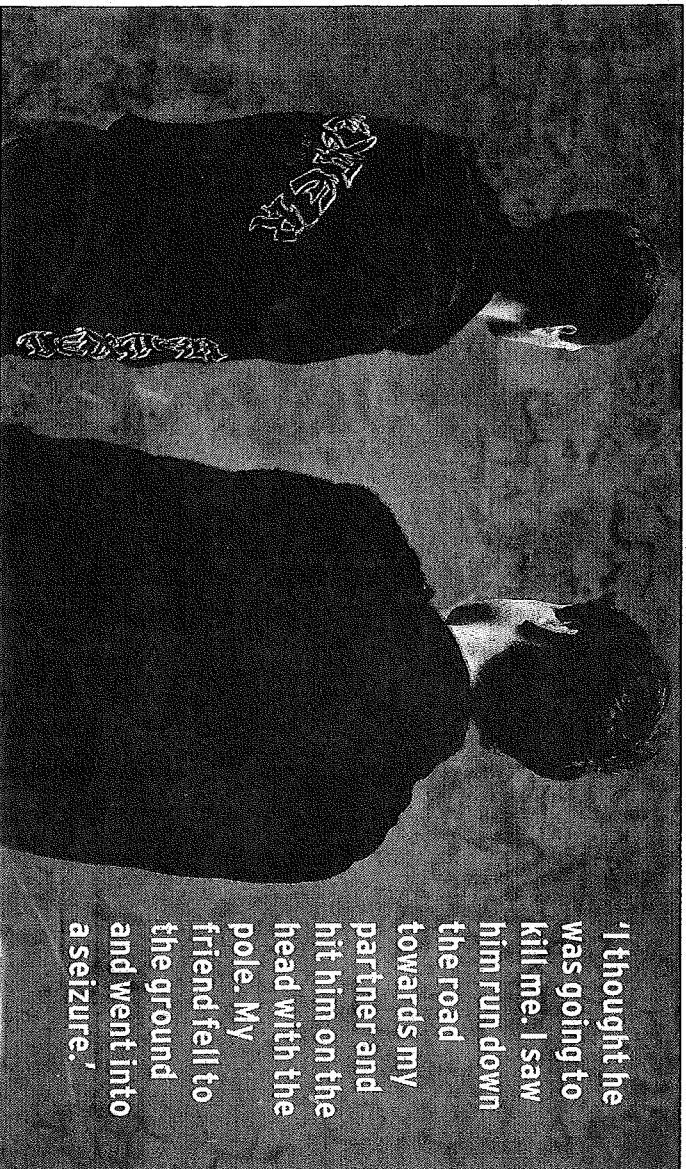
The violent attack in Seven Hills was just one of an average of five assaults on gay and lesbian people that are reported to authorities every month. At least another 30 are attacked without making an official complaint.

The NSW Anti-Discrimination Board has warned that the state-wide violence is being fuelled by an increasing number of homophobic websites being run by Australians.

The 27-year-old victim, who did not wish to be named, said: "We had gone to the club to watch the football and when I was walking through, a guy called me an 'effing faggot' and pushed and tried to punch me. I just ignored it."

But almost two hours later when the man and his partner left the club, the assailant and two accomplices were lying in wait.

"An object hit my head and my vision went blurry. There was half a brick that had hit me in the road. The next minute there were three guys running towards us," he said.



'I thought he was going to kill me. I saw him run down the road towards my partner and hit him on the head with the pole. My friend fell to the ground and went into a seizure.'

Ordeal ... the couple attacked with bricks, bottles and a pole. They are now too scared to visit the local shops.

Photo: James Brickwood

An attacker was wielding a pole and another was throwing bottles from a beer carton. "I thought he was going to kill me," he said.

"I saw him run down the road towards my partner and hit him on the head with the pole. My friend fell to the ground and went into a seizure. His eyes rolled back in his head, he was convulsing and making sickening moaning noises. It was like nothing I had ever seen."

Denise Kairi, a lawyer for one of the victims, said: "To think that this behaviour is still occurring in the 21st century is a sad indictment on our society."

AIDS Council of NSW chief executive Stevie Clayton said the incident was just one of an average of five incidents of homophobic vilification reported every month to the organisation's anti-violence report line.

"Only a small proportion, about 15 per cent, of gay and lesbian people who experience violence report it to the police."

She said many were embarrassed or worried about the reception they would receive.

"What we do know from reports compiled by the police and attorney-general's department is that 85 per cent of people in the gay and lesbian community will experience some kind of violence," Ms Clayton said.

Gay men are four times more likely to meet with violence than other men in Sydney.

NSW Anti-Discrimination Board president Stepan Kerkyasharian said it appeared that the violence was fuelled by an increasing number of homophobic websites.

Several well-known gay bars featured on the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics' top 100 list of most violent bars in NSW.

The Stonewall Hotel on Oxford Street is sixth on the list with 30 violent assaults between January and December last year.

Gay basher walking free

Couple beaten with metal pole in a Blacktown street

ANILAMONT

A gay couple beaten with metal poles is still waiting for justice three months after they were attacked in a Blacktown street. Greg Harland, 27, and his 21-year-old partner Aaron Warnecke were assaulted by men wielding beer bottles and baseball bat-sized metal bars. The incident followed an altercation at an RSL club 90 minutes earlier where a man, who is known to the pair, called them "fucking faggots" and lunged at them.

But three months after the attack Blacktown Police are yet to press charges or lodge an AVO. This is despite the fact that one of the attackers identified by the pair lives just minutes from the victims.

Harland was hit in the head by the attackers, before turning to see a group of men running towards him and Warnecke, throwing beer bottles.

"I just yelled to Aaron and Corey [Aaron's brother] to run," Harland told *Sydney Star Observer*. "This guy had a bottle in his hand and I'm just trying to avoid it by running up the road in awkward directions and then eventually he hit me with the bottle. I remember smelling beer. I could feel punches."

He was then attacked with a metal bar, which he was struck from the man, before turning to see Warnecke being attacked by the same man who verbally assaulted them at the RSL.

"He was running towards Aaron with the bar and then the next minute I see him whack Aaron. Aaron went down on his knees," Harland said.

"He just went plonk. He was convulsing ... he was just making this really blood-curdling moan, and then he just went out. I thought this was the end for Aaron. I honestly thought he was going to die." Warnecke spent two weeks in Blacktown Hospital with a fractured skull and bleeding on the brain. He could not walk or talk, had migraines, ongoing vomiting and intense sensitivity to light and noise.

He has been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. He still gets daily migraines and has short-term

I thought that this was the end for Aaron, I honestly thought he was going to die.

— Greg Harland

memory problems which have forced him to postpone his studies and delay pursuing work. He may need brain surgery and is in therapy to regain his memory and cognitive skills.

Harland also has post-traumatic stress disorder and cannot work. Both suffer from ongoing nightmares about the attack.

On the night of the attack, Harland spoke to a Blacktown Police constable. According to him, the interview took no longer than 10 minutes and no notes were recorded.

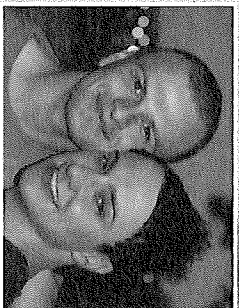
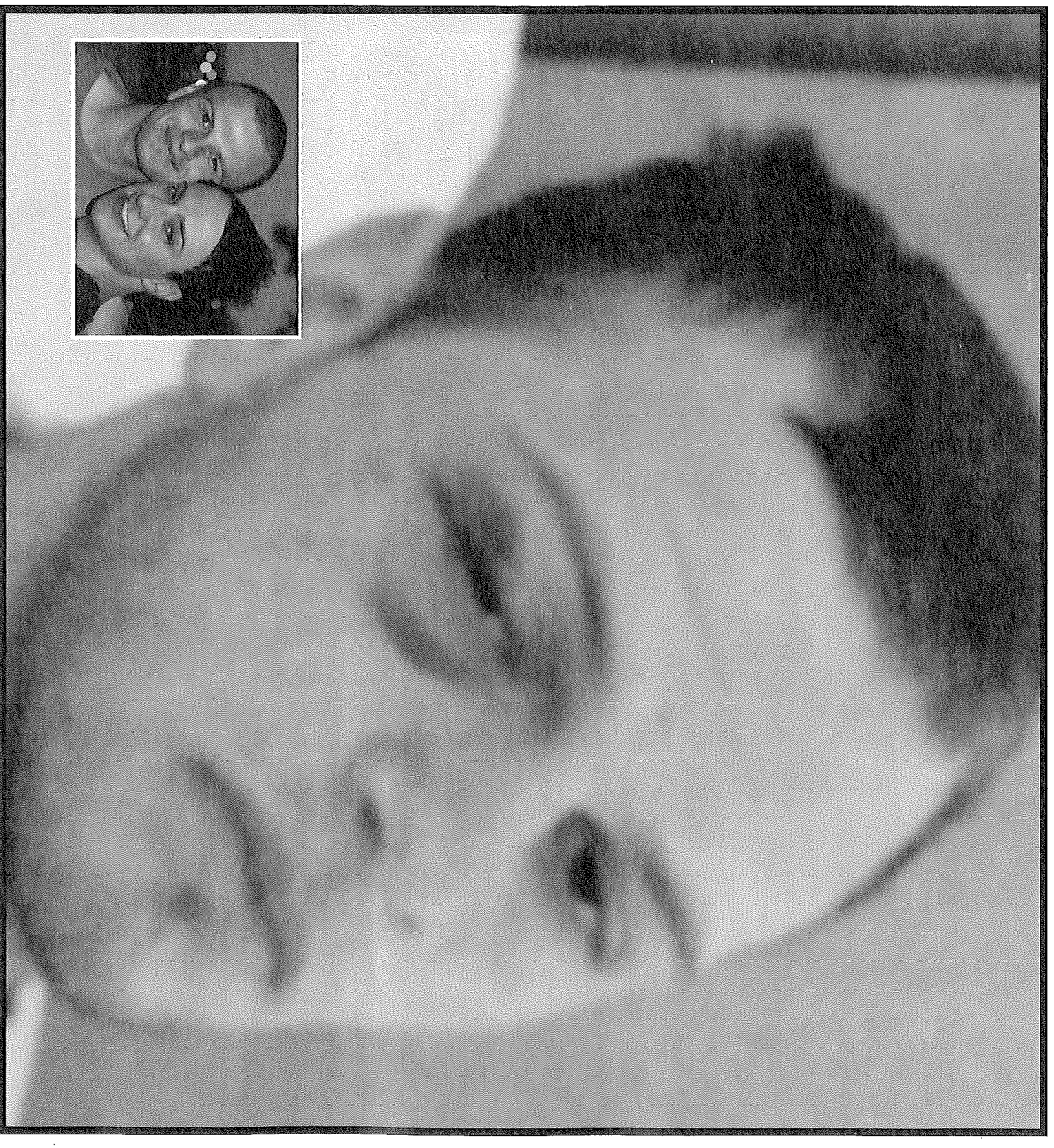
"The constable was insinuating that we had started the argument. He was pretty uninterested in what I had to say," Harland said.

"I said to him, 'Are you able to get the video footage from inside the club? That will clearly show that this guy was highly aggressive to us', and he's just gone, 'Don't fucking tell me how to do my job, I've been a fucking police officer for 14 fucking years.'"

It took police three days to get in contact with Harland to lodge a report.

Despite the pair knowing the name of one of the attackers, police have not pressed charges and have stymied requests for an AVO.

In fact police only started AVO proceedings after Harland and Warnecke



MAIN: Aaron Warnecke in Blacktown Hospital shortly after the attack. **INSET:** Warnecke and Harland before the attack.

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lodge a complaint with the NSW Ombudsman. In July the pair went to Blacktown Court to see the AVO lodged.

only to be told police had not served the papers. They will return to the court later this month.

Harland said repeated attempts to get information from Blacktown Police had failed, as had requests they treat the incident as a hate crime.

"When I mentioned the hate crime stuff he'd say, 'Don't play the gay thing

... an assault's an assault. We don't care if you're straight, gay, transgendered or even bended,'" Harland said.

"[The constable] just keeps saying, 'We're looking at charging him, we're not sure when, we might just question him and charge him at a later date.'

"I just feel so hopeless. Here am I taking Aaron to the hospital and doing all that, we're having to travel suburbs away to do our shopping and all this time it's just not being taken seriously."

A spokeswoman for NSW Police Media said, "a number of lines of inquiry have been pursued by Blacktown Local Area Command, who have been investigating the alleged

assault. "Those inquiries have now been finalised and a brief of evidence is being prepared with the view to obtaining further legal advice in relation to potential charges."

Further comment could not be provided on the case "to protect the integrity of the investigation and any judicial proceedings" and no explanation was given as to why it had taken so long for police to put an AVO in place.

Blacktown police station does not have its own Gay and Lesbian Liaison Officer, but shares one with the nearby Quakers Hill station.

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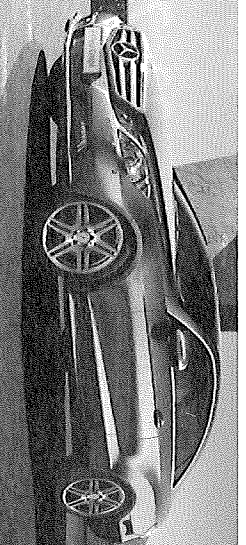
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GAY BASHING #3

So sad that the two of you [Aaron and Greg] had to go public, in order to get any action. Congratulations to you both that you now, at least, have some comfort in an AVO.

I'm generally a quiet supporter when it comes to these types of stories in the paper but this gay bashing in Blacktown really bothered me. It's one of the rare times I decided to do something vocal about it.

Given I didn't think calling Blacktown Police would help, based on other comments posted on the original article last week, I called Blacktown City Council itself to make them aware of the situation. After speaking with some (polite) receptionists, it was suggested I speak with one of the area MPs.

Since Nathan Rees is the MP for Blacktown (clearly he was never going to return my calls), I was put onto MP Paul Gibson. I told him I was a concerned citizen, and that my same-sex partner and I had been considering buying property and moving to the western suburbs ("specifically looking at Blacktown"), bringing last week's article to his attention (he doesn't know of SSO — maybe SSO should be sending their papers to MPs/western Sydney politicians to enlighten them a bit).

When I asked him bluntly if he was able to do anything about it or if it

concerned him that gay bashings are a reality in his district, he was somewhat dismissive, saying it was a police matter, that any comments on the SSO site were hearsay until proven otherwise, and there was nothing he could (would?) do to get involved. He seemed to think this was a one-off case, and it shouldn't influence any gay person's decision whether or not to move to Blacktown. "If you were to use the same criteria as that to decide where you might move to, you wouldn't move anywhere," he said.

Maybe that's the problem.

Aaron and Greg — I can only imagine your frustration in this whole situation. Know that the community is behind you, if not only quietly.

— Kevin

GAY BASHING #8

My heart goes out to Aaron, who has had his life torn apart by this horrific and senseless violence, while his attacker goes free.

Think about the coverage of the Lauren Huxley case — public outpourings of sympathy and grief, her attacker hounded in the press. A young, pretty blonde woman is bashed and left for dead, and it's diabolical.

Two young gay men — well, they had it coming. How many more gay people have to be viciously attacked before something is done about the inept NSW Police?

— Appalled

GAY BASHING #6

As the founder of the Gay and Lesbian Holocaust Memorial Project in 1992, I am disgusted that little has changed since we started this project.

The monument was built in Green Park and completed thanks to Stevie Clayton and Lucy Ellis. Everyone sees the nice

poles. But this is exactly the sort of thing this monument was meant to remind us all to beware of. Will this ever end?

Law enforcement must take this more seriously or this is just going to perpetuate or get worse. How dare they make us all second-class citizens.

This is more urgent than gay marriage, superannuation or whatever. This is a basic human right to have equal protection against violence.

Without our right to safety, we might as well have no rights at all. The outcome is similar, if not exactly the same.

— Saint Fletcher

GAY BASHING #7

As Aaron's sister, I have witnessed abuse towards my brother and my best friend Greg Harland many times we have been out together in the local area. The abuse is unwarranted as sometimes we are only having a quiet drink or a meal somewhere when these bogans swear at my brother, calling him a faggot.

When we are out at straight clubs they don't kiss or hold hands, so I wonder why these mindless idiots would approach them and call them names.

I enjoy going out with my brother Aaron, and Greg, to gay functions and events and have a wider group of beautiful gay friends I have met through them.

Police need to take appropriate actions towards hate crimes. And yes, it was a hate crime. If you're waiting in a car park for over two hours to bash a gay couple you not only have a hatred towards gays but you have some serious issues.

I hope to see justice done for my brother and my best friend Greg. Blacktown wasn't the best place to grow up in, but that doesn't mean Blacktown Police have to treat this like a bogan fight.

— Jasmine

GAY BASHING #1

Hi Greg and Aaron. I'm so glad you two finally got the AVO orders.

I hope the police learn their lesson that just because you're gay doesn't make you immune to injuries a straight person would endure under the same circumstances.

Good on the pair of you for not taking this lying down. Neither of you deserved what happened.

— Annie

GAY BASHING #2

Correct me if I am wrong but in the week since SSO broke this story on their front page there has not been one story on this hate crime against two young gay men in the general media.

This would not be the case if it was a 'beautiful young heterosexual couple' chased down and brutally bashed with a metal pole. I'm sure the story would have made the front page of the *Telegraph*... and the public would be outraged.

We are in 2009 sadly still treated like second-class citizens in our own country.

— Chris

GAY BASHING #4

I dare say, without the publicity from gay sources, this bashing would have been simply written off as 'a couple of poofs getting their desserts,' the old homophobia of the past that really still exists!

— Peter

GAY BASHING #5

My sympathy goes out to Greg and Aaron. Fortunately I have never had anything like this happen to me, but I have learned to be streetwise and steer clear of potential trouble and the police, because, as this case demonstrates, you just cannot trust them, despite having gay and lesbian liaison officers.

Although there are good and well-intentioned police officers out there, unfortunately there are too many who inappropriately use the power they have, and are certainly not friendly to the gay and lesbian community.

— Paul

SX 10/9/09

Blacktown bashings highlight wider gay safety issues: AVP

Peter Hackney

The recent bashing of two gay men in the western Sydney suburb of Blacktown has highlighted the fact that homophobic violence remains an issue everywhere, according to the Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project (AVP).

The AVP stated this week that while attention on homophobic violence in recent years had focused on the Oxford Street precinct, the bashing of Greg Harland and his partner Aaron Warnecke outside the Blacktown RSL highlighted the fact that the GLBT community should

be vigilant against violence in all locations.

"We tend to think of violence against gays and lesbians as something that happens on Oxford Street or at large community gatherings because of their capacity to attract gay bashers," said Mark Orr, president of ACON, which oversees the AVP.

"In fact, fifty percent of violence against gays and lesbians reported to the AVP occurs in inner-city Sydney, with the other fifty per cent occurring in suburban Sydney and country NSW," he told SX.

Orr said the Blacktown bashings reinforced the need for the

community to acquaint itself with street safety measures.

"The AVP has constantly reinforced these measures, but they're always worth repeating - and they're not just applicable to homophobic violence, they're actually good street safety tips generally. Stay alert and be aware of your surroundings, travel in groups where possible, and cross the street to avoid groups of young men, who are the main perpetrators of street violence."

Orr said the incident in Blacktown also highlighted the importance of reporting violent incidents to the police and the AVP.

"The young men involved reported the incident to police, which we really encourage," he said. "But we know that a significant proportion of the homophobic violence that occurs is still not being reported. It is crucial that incidents be reported, so that police resources can be appropriately directed in response."

"Incidence and locations of homophobic violence are among the issues taken into account when police look at placement of GILOs (Gay and Lesbian Liaison Officers), for instance."

Orr added that NSW Police had made "great improvements" in recent

years in their dealings with the GLBT community, under the guidance of NSW Police Corporate Spokesperson for GLBT issues, Superintendent Donna Adney, and NSW Police Assistant Commissioner, Catherine Burn.

"There is no need to fear reporting homophobic violence to police in NSW," he said.

Comprehensive information on street safety can be found at the AVP website, located at avp.acon.org.au/ anti-violence.

Investigations into the bashing of Harland and Warnecke are continuing.



SX NEWS

NATIONAL

5/11/11

NSW school told to apologise

Peter Hackney

Gay people should be eliminated from society.

That was the message printed in a letter, published in a newsletter by a NSW high school, which has become the latest target of gay activist Gary Burns.

The missive is contained in the current edition of *Xavier*, the past students' newsletter published by Xavier High School, a Catholic school in Albany.

Writing in a letter to the editor in the newsletter, former *Xavier* student Mart Price entreated "a world free from homosexuals", who he said lived lives devoted to drugs and sex.

His letter called for businesses not to employ homosexuals, with Price revealing that he lobbies CEOs with his message.

Price, who claims to be a 'cured' homosexual, said his new 'heterosexual' life allowed him to 'lead/heal my spiritual life in the way I was guided as a child'.

"The truth will set you free is what *Xavier* taught me," wrote Price, who now works as a nurse in Queensland. Gary Burns told SX the school was inciting violence against gay people.

"To publish calls for a world free of homosexuals is nothing less than an increment to kill gay people," he said. Burns called on *Xavier* to "apologise unreservedly for this

serious and illegal breach of NSW anti-vilification laws".

He said he had been in touch with the school and invited it "to donate \$5,000 to [gay youth charity] Twenty10 as a practical measure of good faith".

views of the editor or organisation," Powles wrote.

"We live in a country where free speech is available to all," he said. "That said, I apologise for any offence caused ... none was intended."

For breaking news, go to www.evolution.com.au

However, a message on the school's website from headmaster Neville Powles defended the espousal of anti-gay sentiment.

"Letters to the editor in any publication are the views of the author and not necessarily the

SX was unable to speak with Powles, who was reportedly in China.

Other *Xavier* staff were "not allowed" to speak on the matter, while a spokesperson for the Catholic Schools Diocese of Wagga

Wagga, which oversees the school, refused to comment.

Meanwhile, in the nearby town of Beechworth, across the border in Victoria, Gary Hayward of the annual Spring Migration Gay and Lesbian Festival told SX he was "disgusted" by local media reports on the matter.

The Border Mail ran the story under the headline, 'Gay activist wants cash from school', an adjacent article gave full voice to Price's opinions on homosexuality under the headline, 'World of sex and drugs'.

Border Mail editor Heath Harrison did not return calls to SX

Letters - Page 12

SSO 29/11/2007

The voice of a statistic

I grew up in Adelaide, surrounded by the peaceful hippies of the Adelaide Hills.

Despite the reputation for serial killings and bizarre crime, Adelaide does feel exceptionally safe, but there's not a lot of homosexual visibility.

Before moving to Sydney, my longest time spent here was in 2002 when I toured a one-man theatre show over for the Gay

nes. I believe my jaw actually dropped when I saw the Games' banners lining the city streets, the queues of queers at Town Hall for registration, the palpable, engaging presence of this gay and lesbian convergence on the city.

Rightly or wrongly, at that time, I did feel it was a safe space, perhaps not a deeply cultural space, but certainly a town with an easy-going, tolerant, accepting attitude.

I adore Newtown, where the cultural heart of the queer community is migrating. But it was in Newtown that the attack happened.

I remember very little of the attack itself, but it seemed like hours. It's a little like having a series of still photographs that you have to piece together in the order that they most make sense.

Eventually I managed to push him off balance and run, and I don't know if he followed or not.

I have no memory of the run home, except one of those snapshot images. I passed under a streetlight and wiped my hands across my face. That's when I saw the blood. Literally pooled in my hands. I was covered in it. Then nothing.

The next memory snapshot saw me being helped through the front door by my housemate.

The police were called. I had x-rays and scans, and within a week they'd realised my eye was sitting in my sinus. The next thing I'm in hospital on standby for surgery.

And all I really wanted was to go to bed for a month and pretend it wasn't happening.



Queer Screen's Lex Lindsay has been a colourful identity about town, but a vicious bashing last year darkened that gem.

This is why I contacted the Anti-Violence Project at ACON quite early on. I needed someone else to keep track of where I was at in the steps that needed to be taken. My brain had shut down and I couldn't really take the responsibility on for myself.

I'm a gay man who has been publicly waving a very gay flag for the last decade, and I have rarely felt the need to hide my sexuality when talking with strangers. But after being bashed, I did.

I don't recognise the person who made that choice. But when I reflect on that decision, I get closer to understanding the problem we are facing with the under-reporting of homophobic violence.

Everybody you come in contact with needs an explanation for why you're in the state you're in. Meanwhile, you just want the whole thing to be over, so you

keep it brief. I told them I had been mugged – just seemed easier.

When your life has been turned upside down because some bastard has a problem with your sexuality, you don't have the energy to deal with anybody else's discomfort with the issue.

And amazingly, nobody ever asked if I thought it was a hate crime. They're looking at me, the person I am, they hear the nature of the attack and nobody bothers. I've just had my head bashed in, so do you really think being asked if I'm gay is going to be the low point of my week?

I still think about him [the attacker]. He even has a name – "Gummy Joe" is what I call him. If I were to ask you "who are the most influential people in your life" you'd talk about family and friends, colleagues and lovers – and I would too, but I've also got Gummy Joe on the list.

Since the attack I've battled with varying degrees of double vision and loss of vision, as well as the discomfort of having an implant in my head where they repaired the fractured bone.

Every time I have to close one eye just so I can watch TV or read a book, the first five minutes of every day when I only see double, whenever I get fed up with having to wear my glasses – he pops into my head. These are the aspects of my life that he has joint custody over.

Completely uninvited, this man holds a seat at the conference table in my head, and I resent that deeply.

I've thought a lot about what I would define as "justice". I'm a big believer in stepping over the symptom and going right to the source of a problem. And for me, that is institutionalised homophobia at the highest level.

However, I do show greater caution when on the street at night these days. But I think many people in the 2010 postcode would say the same thing.

Sometimes I feel like I've stepped into an episode of *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*, when the Hell-Mouth has begun to open beneath the town, and all the people on the street are turning nuts, talking to themselves, shouting at thin air, being intensely agro, insatiably looking for a fight.

Truly, Oxford St is turning into Sunnydale when Buffy is on vacation.

There were various community groups represented at the police forum last week, but I know why I got an invite.

Somebody had to be there to remind those who have been entrusted with planning "the response" that these under-recorded statistics we grieve over are actually the voices of people.

As told to Harley Dennett

Have your say: Have you been attacked? Tell us about it on our forum at www.ssonet.com.au.

25 MAR '09 5:50

Gay business owners attacked

ANI LAMONT

A gay-operated café in Maroubra has been forced to take down its rainbow flag after the owners were verbally and physically assaulted. Randwick's openly gay mayor responded with disappointment, but maintained that this was a one-off incident.

On the Sunday after Mardi Gras the owner of the Mr Big Stuff Café, John Miller, placed a rainbow flag outside his premises. Four days later he was forced to take it down.

"I'd often thought it'd be a good thing to do but just never had the guts to," Miller, who has run the business for 10 years, said.

"Everyone knows we're a gay couple

who live on the corner — two queens down the street. So we're tolerated, but with the flag that just created a little bit of a scene.

"Did we cop it from the local topless boys. They hurled abuse at us and told me to 'get that fucking gay flag down' or they would piss on it.

"We braved three days of continual abuse, screams from passing cars and on Sunday morning two guys came in and had a nigger at me saying that they wouldn't go down Oxford St waving a 2035 [Maroubra Beach's postcode] flag.

"We left it out for four days and after that I thought, 'there's been too many comments about this and they're not all good, so let's get it down.'"

Miller alleges that he called police, who never responded. Eastern Suburbs Police have denied the claim.

"We've conducted a comprehensive search on our systems in relation to the Mr Big Stuff Café and the latest recorded event was on December 13 2008, so there has been nothing reported," a spokesman for Police Media told *Sydney Star Observer*.

"Reported homophobic violence has definitely not hit our radar in or around the Maroubra area, so it's not a problem that we've been notified about."

Randwick City Council agreed that this was the first case of anti-gay violence they had heard of.

"I feel extremely disappointed about

the homophobic behaviour towards the owners of Mr Big Stuff Café," Randwick mayor Bruce Notley-Smith told *Sydney Star Observer*.

"We should all be proud of the diversity of cultures and people that make up the community of Randwick City — which of course includes our gay and lesbian residents and businesspeople.

"Thankfully, this sort of behaviour is not commonplace in our community. It disturbs me that any business or resident, especially one that has been a part of our city for so long, could be subjected to such disgusting behaviour."

info: The Mr Big Stuff Café is at 24 McKeon St, Maroubra Beach.



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ACON, NSW's leading LGBT health promotion agency, Lesbians and Gay Men's Voice Project, City of Sydney, NSW Police Force, NSW Attorney General's Department, Anti-Violence Project of Victoria, NSW Young Lawyers Human Rights Committee (Same Sex and Anti-Discrimination Working Group), Amnesty International Australia, NSW LGBTQ Network, Diversity Council Australia, Taverly 16, NSW Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby, National LGBT Health Alliance, Metropolitan Community Church Sydney, The Gender Centre, Highchickers Against Homophobia and others.

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CITY OF SYDNEY

The Hon. Michael Kirby AC, CMG, Sydney

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Supt. Donna Adney, NSW Police Force, Sydney

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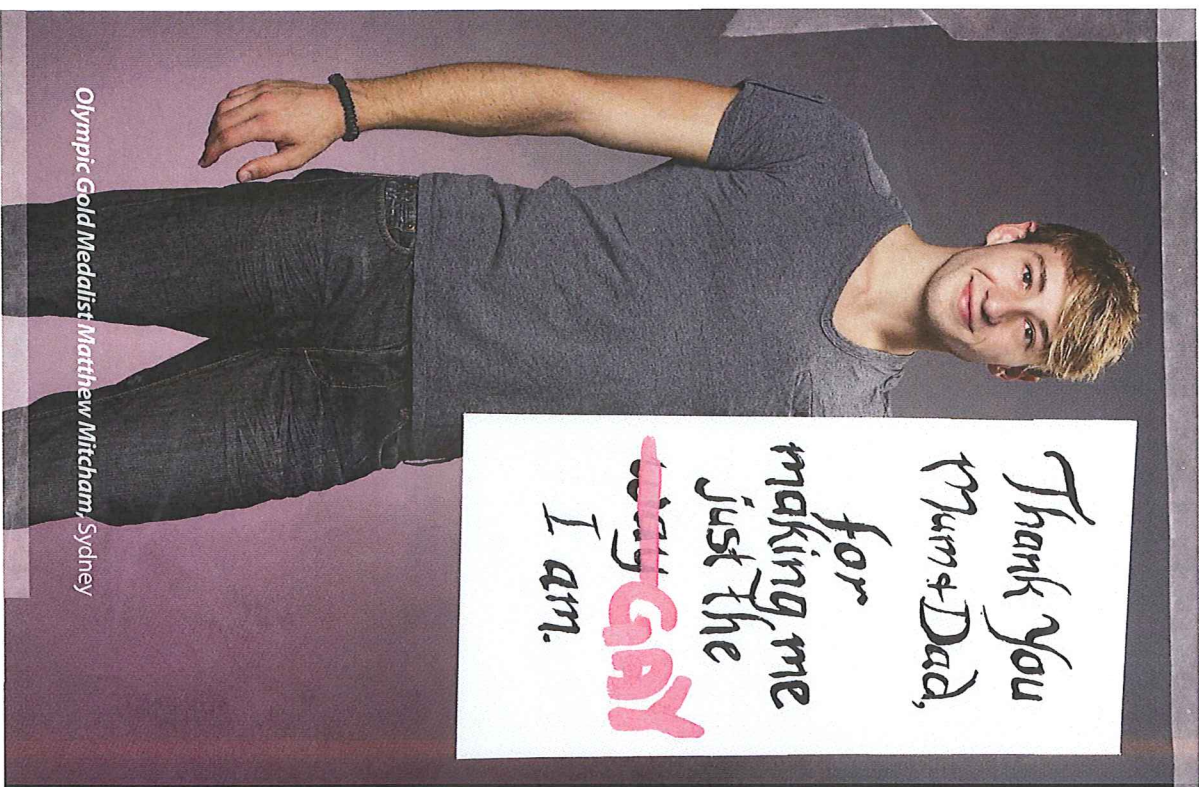
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CITY OF SYDNEY

Ruby Rose, MTV VJ, Sydney



Olympic Gold Medalist Matthew Mitcham Sydney

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As well as lots of everyday folk, we've got TV stars, sportspeople, politicians, musicians and lots of other high profile people on board.

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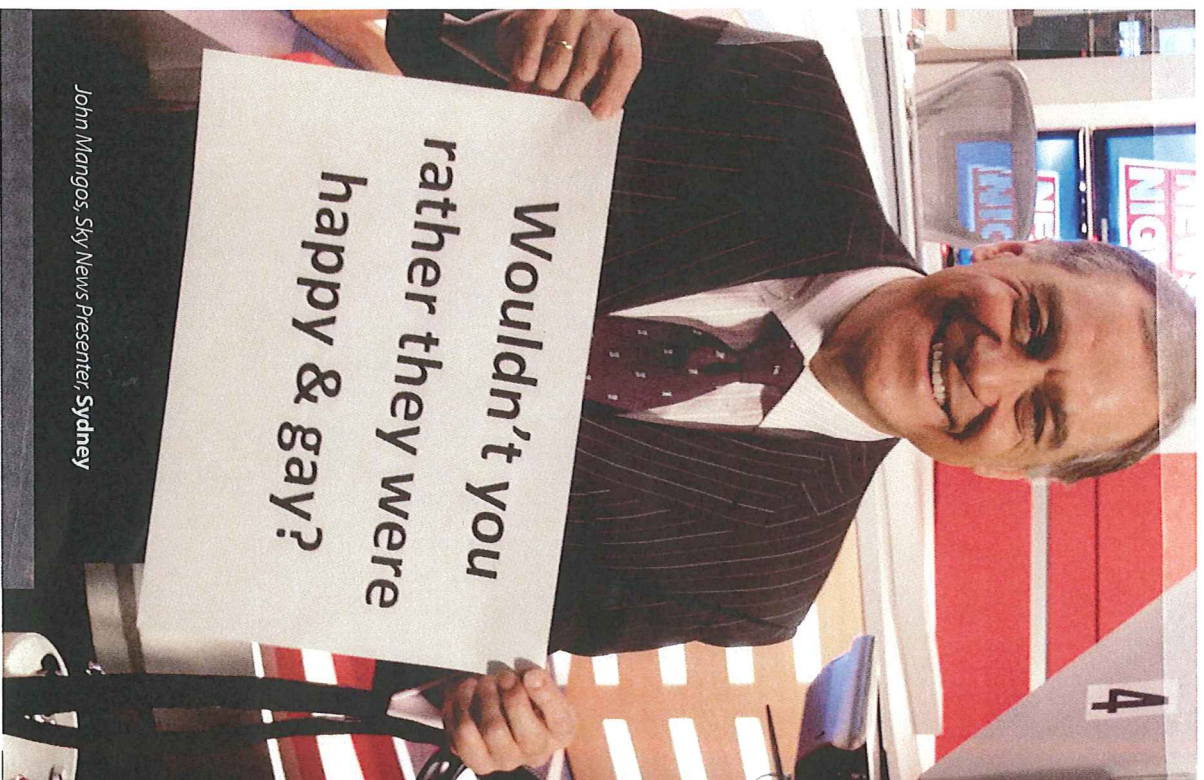
- ACON (NSW's leading GLBT health promotion agency), Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project, City of Sydney,
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John Mangos, Sky News Presenter, Sydney

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WOULDN'T YOU RATHER?

SKY News presenter John Mangos joined the online social inclusion project *This Is Oz* because, coming from a migrant family, he knows too well the pitfalls of discrimination. In fact, back in Grade Four, he was even given detention because his lunch 'ponged':

"I'd like to think that teachers now prefer salami to ham and reggiano to Kraft cheddar," Mangos quips.

Mangos derived his slogan from the 'Chum Song' he used to sing with the late Graham Kennedy: "Being a chum is fun, that is why I'm one, always smiling, always gay, happy at work and happy at play."

"So many connotations then, and so many 'now'!" Mangos laughs. **thisoz.com.au** is an online gallery that's all about making Australia a place where everyone belongs.

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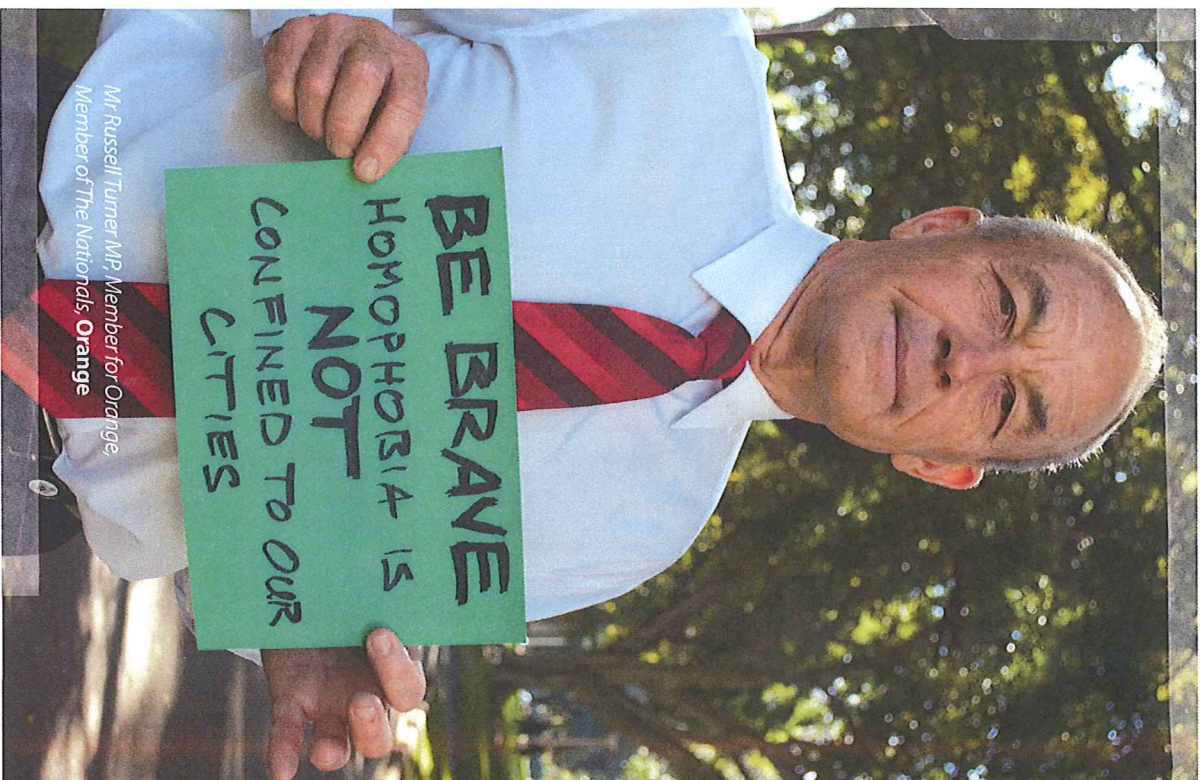
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Mr Russell Turner MP, Member for Orange,
Member of The Nationals, Orange

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BEYOND BORDERS

"Be Brave. Homophobia is NOT confined to our cities."

That's the message Russell Turner, MP for the regional town of Orange in central west New South Wales, wants to get across as part of the online social inclusion project, *This Is Oz*. It became clear to Turner some years ago that young LGBT people were deserting rural areas to escape homophobia.

"I'm asking young gays and lesbians to be brave and acknowledge that community beliefs are slowly changing and homophobia will not disappear overnight," Turner explains. "I'm also asking the wider community to [accept] that homosexuals are just a normal and valuable part of our wide and diverse community."

"They must challenge any homophobic comments made by those ignorant of today's standards and beliefs within their social and workplace, friends and colleagues."

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Po Ling Yeow, artist + cook, Adelaide

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RECIPE FOR LOVE

"Love more, hate less"

Adelaide artist and cook Poh Ling Yeow joined the *This Is Oz* anti-homophobia campaign because she is a very strong believer in equal rights. In the past, she's occasionally been on the end of racial abuse herself.

"I've been very lucky, it hasn't happened often," she says. "But when it does, it comes as a shock." Poh's message: Love more, hate less comes from the heart.

"Hated is such a negative energy to carry around. I mean, how can a parent love their childless, just because they're gay? So many people waste their time hating something they fear or can't understand. In this day and age, hatred and discrimination against any group of people is just ridiculous."

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Penrith Panthers rugby league squad players, Sydney

Junior Tia Killifi, Joseph Paulo, Luke Lewis, Paul Aiton, Geoff Daniela, Frank Puletua



Liz Ellis, Sydney

Australian netball legend



Australian Wallabies, Sydney

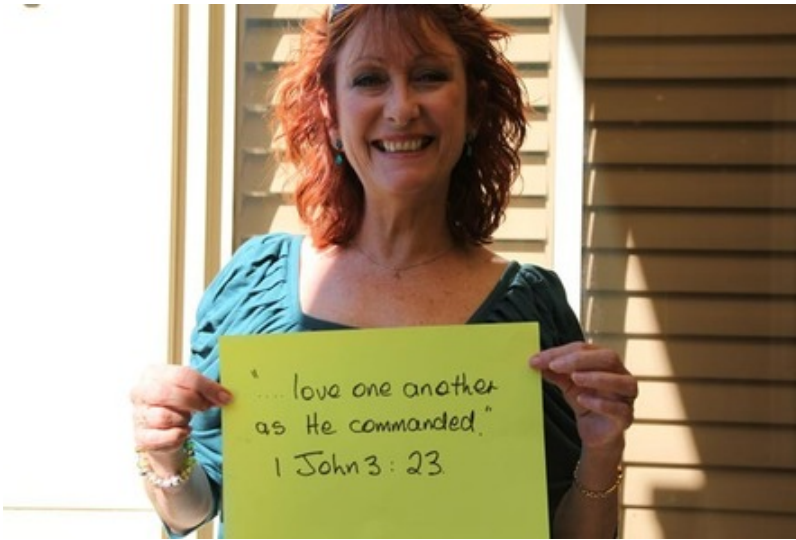
Stephen Moore, Dave Pocock, Stirling Mortlock (Captain), Al Baxter



Paul "Fatty" Vautin, Sydney *The Footy Show, Channel 9*



Lynne McGranger, Sydney *Home and Away, Channel 7*



Tessa James, Jordan Rodrigues + Charlotte Best, Sydney *Actors, Home and Away, Channel 7*



These photographs are from the *This is OZ* website (www.thisisoz.com.au), a partnership between ACON, Evolution Publishing and Samesame.com.au.

DYKE
BASH
POOF
ABUSE
LEZZO
HATE
FAG

SEEN IT? HEARD IT? REPORT IT.

If you have experienced or witnessed any homophobic abuse or violence you can take action by reporting the incident to the Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project (AVP) and the Police.

In an emergency call 000. Otherwise call the **Police Switchboard 9281 0000** and ask to be put through to a **Gay and Lesbian Liaison Officer** in your local area.

When making a report or statement to the police it is important to **describe the incident to police as "sexual preference prejudice" related.** This will ensure that police have accurate data on homophobic violence, harassment and abuse.

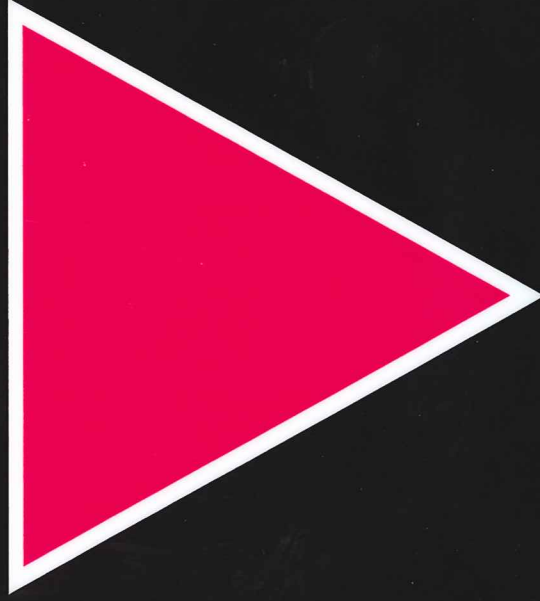
For support and information or to make an anonymous report call the AVP Report Line now or make an online report at www.avp.acon.org.au

02 9206 2116



**SEEN IT?
HEARD IT?
REPORT IT.**

SAFE



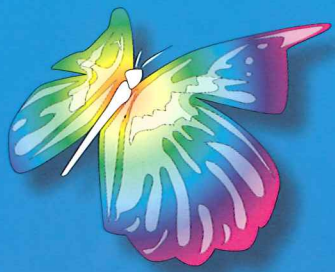
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