

Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual, Transgender and Intersex Elizabeth College Network

The Coming Out Proud Program has endorsed the Elizabeth College GLBTI Network Group model as significant for implementation in High Schools and Colleges in Tasmania.

Anecdotally it is well known that discrimination and intimidation in the community has a direct relation to the incidence of suicide and self-harm amongst young sexual and gender diverse young people.

Research in Australia also shows the results of harassment and discrimination of sexual & gender diverse people especially young people:

- 55 per cent of gay men and lesbians had contemplated self-harm as a direct result of bullying
- 40 per cent had attempted self-harm or suicide on at least one occasion
- 30 per cent had done so more than once.

(Rivers, I., *The Bullying of Sexual Minorities At School: Its Nature and Long Term Correlates*. Educational and Child Psychology. 2001 Vol 18. p39)

This research and the statistics explain the importance of recognising and celebrating initiatives like the Elisabeth College GLBTI Support Group in Tasmanian High Schools.

The GLBTI Support Group is a confidential, discreet, informal forum and support group for students that have been running at Elizabeth College for three years.

The GLBTI Support Group started as an initiative of the Student Equity Group and teacher, Arlette Mercae at Elizabeth College three years ago. The group meets fortnightly for GLBTI students and their friends in a safe environment. Sexual and gender diverse students are able to make new friends and discuss issues of relevance. The Network is promoted in the College newsletter and accessed through a confidential email address that is set up and managed by the coordinating teacher (Arlette Mercae) who also books rooms for meetings, arranges guest speakers, distributes relevant information and acts as community liaison. The College Librarian stocks selected LGBTI literature that is of assistance and interest to the students also assists the Group.

The EC GLBTI Network Model is simple in its implementation without being personnel or resource intensive. It has the benefit of being discreet in an environment of not wanting to attract attention from fundamentalist groups on the fringe of school communities. The model also presents opportunities of ownership by group members and an opportunity to self-determine the direction of the group while developing maturity and growth from the confidence of 'coming out' in a positive and supportive environment.

The COPP endorsement is also built on the development of a GLBTI Tool Kit identifying local and state resources for High Schools and Colleges. The Tool Kit provides access to special counselling, educational, policing, anti-discrimination, health services, social opportunities, and engages mainstream resources that are appropriate for young people in an environment that can be challenging and sometimes hostile. It is intended that this will be loaded on the COPP Web Site www.comingoutproud.org

• Same sex attracted young people (SSAYP) are three times more likely to attempt suicide than heterosexual youth (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)

• 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 Counsellors*. Rural and Remote Health. 2003 Vol 3.)