

Press Release Julian Punch AM

25 May 2009

Anti Discrimination Complaint - Exclusion of the Rights of Sexual & Gender Diverse Young People from the Draft Tasmanian Charter of Rights for Young People in Care

Julian Punch has registered a complaint to the Tasmanian Anti Discrimination Commission regarding the exclusion of the rights of sexual & gender diverse young people in care from the Draft Tasmanian Charter of Rights for Young People in Care.

Ongoing concerns have been raised with the Children and Youth Commissioner Paul Mason regarding attempts by Christian carers to place sexual and gender diverse young people in their care on 'conversion programs because of their 'deviant and decadent natures'.

This concern appears to Mr Punch to not have been dealt with by the Commissioner and makes the complaint a serious and urgent matter to be dealt with prior to the Launch of the Charter of Rights for young people in care by the Minister for Community Services on the 5 June 2009. It had been hoped to conciliate the matters in the complaint prior to the printing and Launch of the Charter, as the inclusion is a very simple formula.

People responsible for the assessment and review of carers approached the Coming Out Proud Co Chairs Kingborough/Huon and Greater Hobart Community Liaison Committees last year regarding their concerns regarding Christian carers attempts at conversion therapy for sexual and gender diverse young people in their care. The practice has also been reported to COPP in a number of Christian agencies delivering youth services, some in receipt of government funding.

Despite these concerns being revealed to the Commissioner and the Commissioner's Adult Advisory Panel they received little if any response.

While respect for the cultural rights of some other 'attribute and minority' groups detailed in the Tasmanian Anti - Discrimination Act 1998 are included in drafts including 'religious freedom' in the draft Charter those of of sexual and gender diverse young people seem to have been excised or relegated to a glossary.

Mr Punch has indicated that the State Government policy and practice of outsourcing human services to religious based organisation without effective protocols or anti discrimination codes to ensure protection of minority groups has accentuated the problem of potential discrimination and intimidation. This vulnerable group of young people are entitled to support and protection by the Children's Commissioner.

Julian Punch as a member of the Children's Commissioners Adult Panel has also referred to the statistics that indicate a strong connection to the incidence of suicide and self harm amongst sexual and gender diverse young people when faced with irresolvable discrimination and intimidation.

Mr Punch said that he is making the complaint 'after serious attempts to make representation and seek a solution or have the matter facilitated by others in Authority'. Mr Punch reiterated that he is 'making the complaint in conscience because I cannot imagine nor live with the suffering of young sexual and gender diverse people given the attitude of Government appointed Christian carers or service agencies who regard them as deviant'. Mr Punch said that he is 'happy to work through a process of conciliation but I am not happy to leave it unresolved given the intransigence of authorities with the power to resolve this matter'.

Julian S Punch AM

Email jpunch@tassie.net.au

Phone H: 03 6239 6606 M: 0429 396 605