



SSAFE IN SCHOOLS NETWORK - NEWSLETTER #2

Welcome to the #2 edition of the **SSAFE in Schools Network** Newsletter! We are both excited and proud to now have the network grow to over 100, with the majority of these being schools from around Victoria. This is a great indication that schools are keen to address the issues young people face in regard to developing their sexual and gender identities.

Who we are...

There are now several of us working on this project and some of you will be familiar with different workers.

Based at the **Action Centre, Family Planning Victoria** :

Ian Seal, Project Co-coordinator

Tim Andrews, Project worker (part time)

Liz Alexander, Project worker (part time)

Contacting us can be hard but one of us is usually available at the Action Centre: (03)9654-4766 or 1800 013 952 or alternatively you can email: ssafe@fpv.org.au

Based at **The Australian Research Centre for Sex Health & Society at La Trobe University**:

Ann Mitchell - chairs the reference group for the project.

Sue Dyson - involved in project evaluation.

What we've been doing..

At SSAFE we've been really busy providing professional development and secondary consultations to schools and community agencies, progressing our collaboration with our five pilot schools in the northern metro area (see below), and working in our priority rural regions – **East Gippsland, Shepparton and Warrnambool**. We have also been working on a series of parent workshops in the Shepparton region, of which we will provide details about in the next newsletter.

A resource for parents is under development. The idea resource will inform parents of the need for schools to be addressing issues of sexual and gender diversity, along with providing advice, support and information to parents who have same sex attracted or transgender children. If you have any ideas about particular things that should be included in such a resource let us know.

What other schools are doing...

Feedback we have received has made it evident that schools are interested in finding out what other schools have done in the past and are currently doing, to address the issues of homophobia and make their environments safer and more inclusive of students who are same sex attracted, or gender non-conforming. Therefore, this newsletter focuses on introducing some schools that have been hard at work around the issue...

Mowbray College has been doing several things to address the issues of homophobia in their school environment. The **Bouverie Family Therapy Centre** has been working with the school on the **Breaking Through Project**. Last year a theatre-based project was run with the year 10s and 11s as a gateway into addressing homophobia and difference. This project is an adaptation of the **Theatre of the Oppressed** model and included students, parents and community members. The student involved in the project produced a resource booklet, 'Making a Difference' as well as a web site.

Two staff have been trained in the theatre format, and continue to use it with other year levels. All staff completed the **Safety in our Schools** training with the **Australian Research Centre in Sex Health & Society**, focused around strategies to address homophobia.

The school is currently reviewing their harassment policies to address harassment and discrimination on the basis of sexuality. Mowbray is an active member of the reference group that provides direction, support and community ownership for **MSSAY (Melton Same Sex Attracted Youth)**. MSSAY is the local social support service for same sex attracted and transgender youth.

Mowbray's Student Health Committee recently organised a special assembly for years 9, 10 and 11 to attend, at which the project worker from MSSAY (Melton Same Sex Attracted Youth) talked to the students about the local social and support service. Wider issues of

homophobia and discrimination were also discussed. The Community Health Nurse also spoke helping to frame the discussion in a wider context of sexuality. The students from the Health Committee then distributed fliers and publicity to all students about these services. These students have also organised publicity for MSSAY to be featured in the schools weekly newsletter that goes home with all students. This demonstrates that students at Mowbray are interested and committed to addressing these issues.

For more information contact John O'Shea, Assistant Principal/Head of Senior School, Mowbray College: 9743 2511.

For more information on the Breaking Through project contact Kerry Proctor at the Bouverie Centre: 9376 9844

St Joseph's College in Geelong have been dedicated to addressing homophobia in their school since 1998 when the school formed a homophobia taskforce towards the end of that school year. A group of staff, with the assistance of Youth Worker Daniel Witthaus, met on a number of occasions to discuss what could be done to overcome homophobia within the culture of the College and a number of staff activities were conducted to highlight the importance of addressing the issue. School policies have since been reviewed and resources shared on the topic.

During 1999 St Joseph's was involved in the pilot program for Pride & Prejudice, (described in the previous SSAFE network newsletter). This was conducted with a Year 9 class and was written by Daniel Witthaus in conjunction with the Year 9 Staff. Student evaluations were excellent and provided Daniel with the belief that further development was worthwhile. The package was launched by Vic Health earlier this year and is well developed and resourced. Eight of their staff will be in-serviced over a two-day period later this year so that they can deliver the programs, and all Year 9 students will be involved in 2003.

The college Principal has addressed the students at school assemblies about homophobia, and has briefed parents through a newsletter. Homophobia is also a unit covered by all Year 12 students in Year 12 Religious Education. This active focus in addressing homophobia by St Joseph's College Geelong has led to a significant change in school culture, whereby all students are more tolerant of differences including students who are same sex attracted.

For further information contact Paul Tobias, Principal, St Joseph's Geelong: 03 5226 8100

Eltham High School philosophy promotes diversity, and for some years has had small numbers of students who are “out” about their sexual orientation. School harassment policies make explicit mention of the fact that harassment on the grounds of someone’s sexual orientation will not be tolerated, and the school is considering a specific homophobia policy, along the lines of their racism policy, which acknowledges the broader, systemic nature of these types of discrimination.

Eltham High is an active organisational participant in the local area same-sex attracted reference group, providing strategic direction for the social support group for SSAY that exists in the area, alongside a number of other schools and community agencies. Last year the school invited the facilitators of this group (from local government) and from the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society and Family Planning Victoria, to address the whole staff regarding issues for same-sex attracted students.

Since beginning collaboration with the SSAFE Project, Eltham High has had key staff complete an audit regarding the school’s inclusion of same-sex attracted issues across curriculum, welfare and policy. They are planning a forum, facilitated by SSAFE, for a number of students to have their say as well, and will distribute a student version of the SSAFE audit to middle school health education classes.

Recently the school used a number of books that they had purchased for their library, as well as posters provided by SSAFE, to develop a display on sexuality, with a particular focus on same-sex attraction. The display was set up in the school library, and maintained through the period in which parent-teacher interviews for every year level took place in the library itself. Overwhelmingly, parents responded positively to this.

Existing health curriculum in the school is inclusive of same-sex attraction, but the school has identified that they would like further resourcing in this area.

For further information contact Brendan Monigatti, Student Welfare Coordinator, Eltham High School: 9439 5111

La Trobe Secondary College is another school in the northern metropolitan region working in collaboration with the SSAFE project on developing a whole school approach. They have shown a commitment

to redeveloping areas within the school they recognise as needing improvement.

To begin the process all staff completed an audit around sexual diversity in their school to assess areas where they feel development is necessary. The outcomes have included a consensus that homophobia is an issue in the school that needs addressing. Among the areas that staff have identified, as a high priority for change, is a review of the bullying and harassment policy to be inclusive of homophobia. A working group has been set up which includes the school Nurse, Student Welfare Coordinator, Assistant Principal, and the Health Education Co-ordinator.

Staff has also expressed a need for professional development and as a result two key staff members are doing the **Talking Sexual Health** training. 'Talking Sexual Health' is a national framework for education around sexual health, which advocates a whole school approach and addresses issues of sexual diversity.

Another significant advancement within the school is the inclusion of all students in this project. All students will soon complete a 'student audit' around how they feel the school is responding to issues of same-sex attraction and gender non-conformity. This is particularly important as it includes students in the development of the school and its processes, along with highlighting the schools' commitment to addressing these issues.

The SSAFE Project helped to facilitate sessions for all Year 9 classes to raise students' awareness around these issues and reduce homophobic sentiment, and will assist the school in development of further curriculum.

For further information contact Desiree Smith, School Nurse, La Trobe Secondary College: 03 9459 9633

Share your successes here...

If your school has developed any strategies, policies or programs for challenging prejudice and supporting same-sex attracted and gender diverse students, drop us a line. We'd love to include it in our next newsletter.

So what can we do for you?

We're keen to hear how we can best support your work in schools. We're available for consultation and professional development, and can point you in the direction of various resources. We can support you in the development and implementation of inclusive curriculum and policy, and connect you with community agencies and programs that have specialist knowledge and experience of working with same-sex attracted youth. We can liaise with you to explore the best ways of approaching these complex tasks with whole school communities. We generally can't do direct work with your students, unless it's as a part of a broader project we develop with you.

We are now in the process of planning a conference that will take place around April 2003. This will be an opportunity for teachers and others who work with young people to learn about and share experiences, practices and models that currently exist or are being developed in schools. We are currently looking at program structure and planning and are wanting any feedback or ideas from any of you, giving us suggestions on what you would find most useful. In order for this conference to respond appropriately to your needs we would appreciate any suggestions or ideas on what you would like to see included and addressed.

Did you know about?...

Safety in our Schools: Responding to Homophobia Workshop

This is a free workshop running from 215 Franklin St, Melbourne on the 17th February 2003. It is aimed at increasing awareness and understanding of the risk factors faced by same sex attracted youth and making schools safer places for these students. Run by the **Australian Research Centre for Sex Health and Society** this is a highly valuable and successful workshop that has been run for school staff throughout Victoria. For bookings call Sylvia Azzopardi on 9285 5125, or s.azzopardi@latrobe.edu.au. There are only a few places left to get in fast!

Not Quite Straight (NQS)

NQS is a social support group for young people aged 14-18 in and around the Camberwell area. NQS meets weekly from 4-6pm. For

details contact Kate on 9882 2621 or email
kclark@boroondara.vic.gov.au

Melton Same Sex Attracted Youth (MSSAY)

This is a social and support service for young people under 18 who are gay, lesbian, bi, transgender or unsure in and around the Melton area. This service gives the participants opportunity to meet other and get access to support and information. For more info call Liz or Katherine at Djerriwarrh Health Services: 9747 0700 or 0408 109 032 or email elizabetha@mchc.com.au.

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A social group for same sex attracted youth 14-25 in the Ballarat region. For more info contact Brendan at the City of Ballarat Youth Services: 5320 5644, brendansartori@ballarat.vic.gov.au

The Gay and Lesbian Youth Project

The **Gay and Lesbian Youth Project** in the eastern region, which has been funded by **DHS** has a plan to work together with 8 – 10 secondary schools in the region to develop whole-school approaches that will create safe and supportive environments for same sex attracted students. Pilot schools will receive support and resources to implement strategies that build on already existing policies and frameworks, such as **Mind Matters, Health Promoting Schools**, and the **Framework for Student Support Services**. The process will include professional development and training for staff, policy and curriculum development, student education and support, and work with the broader community.

So far the project has the commitment of a government school in the Shire of Yarra Ranges. If your school is in the eastern region and is interested in being a pilot school committed to implementing a whole school approach to support same sex attracted young people and addressing homophobia in 2003, or if you would like some more information about the project, please contact Shelley on 9298 8858 or 0408 689 715 or email: shelley.walker@knox.vic.gov.au.

Gay & Lesbian Switchboard

Free & confidential telephone counselling and support for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender people or those questioning their sexuality. Switchboard operates between 6-10 six days, & 2-10pm Wednesdays. Free call throughout country Victoria: 9827 8544 or 1800 631 493.

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