

## SSAFE NEWSLETTER NUMBER 7

December 2003

Welcome to the seventh edition of the SSAFE newsletter. This is now going out to over 170 people from all over the country from a variety of schools and agencies!

This edition focuses on **school policy**. It is important that harassment and discrimination based on sexual orientation be recognised explicitly in school policies on equity, bullying and harassment. This is a crucial part of a whole school approach to addressing homophobia and supporting sexual diversity. It also enables the school to place the whole issue in its appropriate context-that of equity and the right of all students to an appropriate education in a safe, supportive learning environment. Clear and explicit policy sets a benchmark for appropriate behaviour, enabling teachers, school staff and students to feel supported in challenging others about their discriminatory language and practices.

School Charters and Staff and Students Codes of Conduct which should include anti-bullying and anti-harassment policies are relevant places to articulate a school's proactive approach to and vision for the creation and maintenance of a school environment that is safe, affirming and relevant for the diversity of students attending. They are also relevant sites for spelling out the responsibilities of all staff and all students under the Equal Opportunity Act 1995. Under this act it is against the law to discriminate directly or indirectly against someone because of their 'lawful sexual activity/sexual orientation'. This 'includes gay men, lesbians, bisexual persons' (Equal Opportunity Commission Rights and Responsibilities under the Victorian Equal Opportunity Act 1995, Government of Victoria, 1996).

Mowbray Secondary College and La Trobe Secondary College have kindly let us include copies of their recently updated and newly developed policies that address homophobic harassment. Both schools have found that the process of changing and creating policies has provided the opportunity to further educate staff, students and parents on the importance of these issues. Thankyou to both schools for letting us publicise your fantastic work!

### **SAFE SCHOOL POLICY: LA TROBE SECONDARY COLLEGE**

As part of their work with the SSAFE project and the local Same Sex Attracted Youth Support Project La Trobe Secondary decided to develop a policy which they have named their 'Safe School Policy' which addresses bullying, harassment and discrimination. School staff reworked the existing policy, to explicitly include sexual orientation. The school then took this to the school council which includes parents of students attending the school. The council were very supportive of the policy. The next step is to ensure all staff review the policy and make any comments, and students are also to be given an opportunity to comment of the policy in classroom sessions. La Trobe plan to launch the policy formally in 2004. The staff handbooks for 2004 will include the Safe School Policy as will the student diaries for 2005.

The draft copy of the policy follows below.

# Safe School Policy

## La Trobe Secondary College

### DRAFT

#### Introduction

La Trobe Secondary College acknowledges the equality of worth, dignity and self-respect shared by all members of the College community: students, teachers, staff, families, neighbours and others.

We acknowledge the multicultural mix of those within our college community and the world around us.

We acknowledge the diversity of individuals and families, beliefs and practices, lifestyles and customs, which are contained within and outside our college community.

We affirm and respect the differences between individuals and each person's right to enjoy a safe and nurturing environment.

We acknowledge our role as educators, peers and role models to provide a positive and safe place where our students are free to explore themselves and their world, and to practice the skills necessary for them to become fully educated, aware, compassionate and empowered citizens.

We recognise the policies and principles contained within the laws and ethical frameworks of our society, whereby all people are to be treated equally and with respect; and which place responsibility upon individuals and schools to provide a safe and caring environment.

#### **Policy Commitment:**

- Members of the community of La Trobe Secondary College will not use any words, behaviours or practices, which are racist, sexist or homophobic, or which for any other reason might exclude or discriminate against others.
- We are committed to showing respect for students, teachers, staff, families and other community members at all times.
- We will work to eliminate any forms of behaviour that do not protect safety or show full respect for those around us.
- We agree to support and encourage individuals in our community to aim for their full potential, developing their unique skills and individuality.
- We agree to abide by the following policies to ensure an environment that is free of threats, bullying and harassment.

#### Framework:

This policy is set in place to support the requirements and principles of the following laws and documents:

- Equal Opportunity Act, Victoria (1995, 2001 & 2002)
- Anti-Discrimination legislation (Federal and State)
- Framework for Student Support Services, DE&T Victoria
- Health and Sexual Diversity Report, Victorian Government 2003-11-18 Privacy Act, Victoria (2001)
- Boys and Literacy Policy, La Trobe Secondary College (2000)

It is illegal to treat someone unfairly or harass them because of their actual or assumed:

- |                         |                                   |                                |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| - age                   | - sex                             | - Career status                |
| - disability impairment | - sexual orientation              | - Industrial activity          |
| - parental status       | - marital status                  | - religious belief or activity |
| - physical features     | - gender identity                 | - pregnancy                    |
| - race                  | - political beliefs or activities |                                |
- Personal association with someone who has, or is believed to have these characteristics

It is also illegal to sexually harass another person, or to allow direct or indirect discrimination. Schools and their communities are required to act in response to any such discrimination or harassment. Failure to act could also be seen as implicit endorsement of such discrimination.

**Policy Review:**

This policy shall be reviewed during Term 1 every year (or at other times if needed) to reflect changes in legislation or practice.

**Definitions:**

Bullying, harassment and discrimination are not accepted at the College and will be dealt with seriously and sensitively when reported. Bullying and harassment can occur in different forms and none is acceptable or too trivial to warrant complaint.

Some forms of bullying and harassment may take these forms or examples:

**Physical** Any physical intimidation, such as fighting, pushing around or mobbing

**Sexual** Any written, verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature that is unwelcomed

**Verbal** Any abusive language directed at another individual, or group of people, that makes them feel unwelcome, offended or unsafe. This may include name calling, jokes etc.

**Isolation** Actions that isolate someone, aimed at making them feel unwelcome or uncomfortable

**Extortion** Taking or misusing the possessions of another, which causes them to feel unsafe or distressed.

**Racial** Comments about another's racial identity or culture, making them feel unsafe, offended or uncomfortable.

**Homophobic** Comments about another's real or assumed sexual orientation, making them feel unsafe, offended or uncomfortable. This can also include negative comments about gay, lesbian or bisexual people.

**Transphobia** Comments about another's real or assumed gender identity, making them feel unsafe, offended or uncomfortable.

Bullying or harassment can include posters, pictures, writing; or verbal, electronic, email or SMS comments.

Discrimination means treating the individual, or group of people, unfairly based upon a real or imagined attribute.

**Grievance Procedures:**

Staff and students should report all instances of bullying or harassment to the relevant Sub School Manager and the Student Welfare Coordinator (SWC). Their reports shall be treated thoroughly and confidentially. Each case will be assessed regarding its severity and appropriate action shall be taken.

Consequences for bullying and harassment may include: counselling, internal discipline, parental interview, suspension or expulsion.

The Sub School Manager has the responsibility for investigating and dealing with cases of reported bullying or harassment. The SWC will be involved in the investigation. Where the matter is severe, the Principal should be involved and the police may be called.

**For further information on this policy you can contact Geoff Allshorn or Desiree Smith at La Trobe Secondary College.**

## MOWBRAY SECONDARY COLLEGE POLICY

A whole staff PD focusing on supporting same sex attracted students propelled Mowbray Secondary College staff into actively addressing homophobia through many levels of the school. Part of this approach was to look at including homophobic harassment in there already standing Sexual Harassment Policy. The result is as follows.

### MOWBRAY COLLEGE SEXUAL HARASSMENT POLICY

**AUGUST 1993**

The following is an extract from the Sexual Harassment Policy as issued to all adult students.

The Victorian Equal Opportunity Act 1984 makes it unlawful to sexually harass a person. The Law affects adult students (16 years and over), teachers, support staff and independent contractors.

The relevant sections of the Act are:

28F(1) It is unlawful for a member of the staff of an educational institution to sexually harass:

- (a) a person who is a student at the institution or
- (b) a person who is seeking to become a student at the institution.

28F(2) It is unlawful for a person who is an adult student at an educational institution to sexually harass:

- (a) a person who is an adult student at the institution or
- (b) a member of the staff of the institution.

The above applies to the main Campus, the College campsites and any other location where the business of the College is being conducted. Clearly sexual harassment between students, adults, and adults and students, is unlawful and is not to be tolerated.

#### WHAT IS SEXUAL HARASSMENT?

Sexual harassment can consist of any or all of the following:

- unwelcome comments of a sexual nature about a person's physical appearance, **sexual orientation, same-sex attraction** or sexual behaviour.
- Suggestive behaviour such as staring, leering or ogling.
- Unnecessary familiarity such as deliberately brushing up against a person.
- Sexual jokes, offensive telephone calls, photographs, reading matter or objects – sexual propositions or continual requests to "go out".
- Physical contact such as touching or fondling.
- Using blackmail or threatening to make public details of a person's behaviour – indecent assault or rape (which are also criminal offences).

#### REPORTING

The law makes the Principal responsible for any act of sexual harassment, so any instances should be addressed to him before other statutory bodies are involved. The College will take the opportunity to resolve an instance of reported sexual harassment by implementing procedures outlined in this policy. Initially, the report may be made to the Principal directly or via a parent, guardian or trusted teacher.

#### RESOLUTION

The Principal, on receiving a report of alleged sexual harassment, will interview all parties involved. At this and subsequent interviews, students should be accompanied by a parent, guardian or nominated representative.

If the Principal believes there is a case of sexual harassment, he will seek to find a suitable resolution.

#### ENFORCEMENT

The following measures will be taken to ensure that Mowbray College is free of sexual harassment:

- (a) A survey will be conducted once per year to gauge the effectiveness of this policy.
- (b) The implementation strategies outlined under Publicity, Professional Development and Pastoral Care will be carried out as specified.

#### PASTORAL CARE

At least twice per year, Homegroup teachers will discuss sexual harassment issues with their Homegroups at an appropriate level. The following points should be covered:

- (a) What the student should do if sexual harassment is suspected or felt.
- (b) Explain in appropriate terms what constitutes sexual harassment and that under State law, it is

illegal.

- (c) In an educational setting, students are protected from discrimination involving teachers or other staff. If a student has reason to believe that she/he will be disadvantaged in any way in relation to educational activities by refusing to accept or tolerate sexual harassment they should report the matter as described previously.
- (d) Whether or not sexual harassment has occurred depends entirely on the interpretation of an incident by the individual. However, the consequences of wrongful accusation should be fully explained. The law strongly protects a person wrongly accused either verbally or in writing. Many teachers have good friendly relationships with their pupils, this should not be mistaken for sexual harassment.

#### **CODES OF BEHAVIOUR**

Staff and students must be mindful in their interactions with others, of situations, actions and words that can leave the target person feeling powerless and humiliated. Clearly if a person behaving in this way refuses to change their sexist behaviour even when asked to, this is harassment rather than a genuine attempt to communicate.

#### **HARASSMENT**

Our aim is to create an atmosphere of trust and security, where individuals can be who they want to be and go about their lives free from any form of harassment. We encourage students to look after each other, respect property and the rights of others. It is expected that the students' behaviour to each other reflects the care our Pastoral System shows to all students.

##### **Definition:**

Harassment is defined as repeated oppression, physical or psychological, of less powerful individuals or groups. This can take the form of physical abuse – e.g. hitting, kicking or psychological abuse – e.g. verbal abuse, threatening gestures, deliberate exclusion, removing and hiding belongings and the spreading of malicious rumours and racial taunts.

##### **Key Principles:**

- (a) Mowbray College will not condone any sort of bullying behaviour on its precincts.
- (b) Bullying affects not only those involved but the whole school community's quest for peace, equality and justice.
- (c) Mowbray College strives to provide a caring and supportive environment for staff and students in which bullying cannot be tolerated.
- (d) The development and implementation of a Behaviour Management program where students' rights and responsibilities are clearly stated will be part of normal Homegroup sessions.
- (e) Peer Support (buddy) programs between older and younger students will be encouraged throughout the College.
- (f) Counselling will be provided for all involved as part of the Pastoral Care system.
- (g) Professional development of teachers and others involved in conciliation and counselling will continue as per need.
- (h) Any instances of bullying should be reported to the Homegroup Teacher immediately, who will initiate conciliation and counselling for all affected parties.
- (i) All instances where counselling and conciliation has commenced must be reported to the Principal. Update reports must be made on a regular basis.

For further information you can contact John O'Shea at the Melton campus of Mowbray Secondary College

Both of these schools recognise the importance of involving students in the process of adapting or creating policy that addresses homophobia. The changes in policy can be used as the basis for education sessions and discussions with student around the issues. As we have found here at SSAFE, it can often be students themselves who are pushing for change in policy. Check out the following website which is a great one for students wanting to be actively involved in informing their schools policy...

<http://www.policyatschool.org> or <http://extranet.edfac.unimelb.edu.au/EPM/policyatschool>

This is an informative website designed specifically for secondary school students. A tool for members of Student Representative Councils (or equivalent bodies) who want to be involved in initiating or revising school policies to benefit the whole school community.

Written, designed and produced by trainee teachers at the University of Melbourne, in collaboration with the Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC).

## Did you know about...

### **Pride & Prejudice Program website:**

Do you work in or with a school where homophobia is an issue?

Sick and tired of hearing students say "that's so gay"?

Know something has to be done but not how to do it?

Introducing [www.prideandprejudice.com.au](http://www.prideandprejudice.com.au) a website for the Pride & Prejudice package:

- A formally evaluated, school-based approach to sexual diversity and homophobia. A six-week program with easy-to-follow session plans, handouts and evaluation tools. A six-part, complementary video featuring young gay and lesbian people discussing their lives and experiences.
- Shown to have significantly changed student attitudes toward gay men and lesbians after 6 weeks. (Health Promotion Journal of Australia, Dec 2001)

At [www.prideandprejudice.com.au](http://www.prideandprejudice.com.au) find out:

- How to order the package;
- How students, teachers and workers have responded to the package and the training;
- Training and other professional development opportunities;
- What's happening with Pride & Prejudice around Victoria and the rest of Australia.

A collaboration between: City of Greater Geelong, Moonee Valley City Council and Deakin University, funded by VicHealth.

### **GASP! - Geelong Adolescent Sexuality Project**

Those of you in the Geelong region may have heard of GASP! the Geelong Adolescent Sexuality Project. GASP offers information, referral, someone to talk to, support and social stuff for Same Sex Attracted and questioning young people in the Geelong region. Also there is P-FLAG, a support group for parents, families and friends of lesbians and gays. For more information call Susanne on 5227 0977.

### **Writing Themselves In Again**

Attention workers – please pass this information on to young people:

The Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University, is conducting its second national survey of the health and well-being of same-sex attracted young people (SSAY) with *Writing Themselves In Again*. They're looking for young people aged between 14 and 21 who are same sex attracted to fill in the anonymous and confidential (and short) survey, which can be accessed via <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/ssay/>. Alternatively, young people can ask for a hard copy to be sent to them by calling 1800 678 811. For further information call Dr Lynne Hillier on (03) 9285 5360 or Alina Turner on (03) 9285 5374.

### **Hobsons Bay Youth Services**

Hobsons Bay Youth Services runs a fortnightly social support group for young people who are same sex attracted, bi, lesbian, gay, queer, transgender or unsure of their sexuality and/or gender. The group is for young people aged 21 and under who live in either Hobsons Bay or Wyndham. For general inquiries or information on how to join the group please contact Daniela on 9932 3003 or email [dbeardsley@hobsonsbay.vic.gov.au](mailto:dbeardsley@hobsonsbay.vic.gov.au)

### **Young & Gay**

Young & Gay is a free and confidential six week discussion-based group for guys aged 26 and under. Each session starts at 7:00 pm and finishes at approximately 10:30 pm. Each group has up to 12 participants. They tend to be from a variety of backgrounds and at various stages of identifying that they are attracted to other guys. Trained facilitators lead the groups. Groups are generally held on Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday nights at the VAC 6 Claremont St South Yarra. For more information ring Asvin 9865-6700.