



SSAFE IN SCHOOLS NETWORK - NEWSLETTER #1

Welcome to the first SSAFE in Schools Network newsletter!

We've been really pleased with the response from schools and agencies. This first newsletter is going out to over 70 network members, with over half of these from schools, and the numbers continue to grow.

We've making this newsletter 'low-tech', as some of you had concerns about the ability of your computer systems to receive documents with lots of graphics and other funky stuff. As the network grows we're hoping to use electronic newsletters to promote the work of schools across the state and to let you know about programs, activities and resources that you can use in your own work.

For those who don't know much about SSAFE in Schools, a brief history lesson...

SSAFE (Same-Sex Attracted Friendly Environments) in Schools was funded in October 2001 to support schools, and community agencies that work with schools, in the development and maintenance of school environments that are safe and affirming for students who are same-sex attracted or gender non-conforming. The funding, under **VicHealth's** Mental Health Promotion Plan, was to allow **Family Planning Victoria** and LaTrobe University's **Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society** to do the following. Develop a web site of useful resources and links, distribute newsletters to a network of interested schools, provide twelve days of professional development to teachers and community workers and host a conference.

With the establishment of the project, the Project Worker's time (one day a week!) was soon in demand for consultation to schools, participation in local and regional networks, and delivery of professional development. It also became clear that there were gaps in the resources available to schools for taking on the complex work of challenging homophobia. We applied in June to the **Premier's Drug Prevention Council** and were successful in obtaining further funding, with the result that we now have 1.4 EFT positions, and a budget that

will allow us to visit more of the state, and to produce resources and programs for schools.

SSAFE in Schools has a reference group that includes representation from the following organisations. The **Department of Education and Training**, **Department of Human Services**, the **Catholic Education Office**, **Parents Victoria**, the **Youth Affairs Council of Victoria**, **VicHealth**, the **Bouverie Family Therapy Centre**, **Family Planning Victoria**, **LaTrobe University**, a number of local government and church-based, youth services and the Principal of a State secondary college.

The project aims to promote and support the implementation of whole-school approaches to addressing the health and welfare of same-sex attracted and gender non-conforming students, and challenging homophobia. In articulating whole-school approaches to this work the project recognises and builds on the significant work already taking place in many schools. The approach is not prescriptive, and will work within existing whole-school frameworks in use in schools, such as **Health Promoting Schools**, the **Framework for Student Support Services** and **MindMatters**. It is not the intent of the project to focus on the "rights" of same-sex attracted students, or on sex, or to develop special programs; rather the work develops inclusive school practices, as advocated for in the frameworks mentioned above. These recognise the need for holistic, comprehensive approaches including policy development, professional development for staff, inclusive curriculum, welfare support and work with the broader community.

And so far...

We've been pleased and excited by the interest in SSAFE in Schools to date. With the project at full speed for less than two months so far, we've been hard at work on the following –

- meetings and discussion with five schools in the Northern Metro region interested in exploring whole-school approaches; three of the schools have begun implementing preliminary strategies and programs;
- meeting with the Student Welfare Network in East Gippsland with plans to look at collaboration across the network with SSAFE;

- a community forum in Shepparton, with the outcome that SSAFE will develop and implement a program for parents, beginning in September;
- gathering resources and information for the web site;
- professional development for more than thirty community workers focussed on how to work with schools on sexuality issues;
- development of a resource kit for schools and agencies participating in professional development;
- a lot of phone calls for information and resources!

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 meet 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. If we're coming out to you in rural Victoria we appreciate opportunities you might be able to identify for us to work with your neighbouring schools, community agencies, and networks at the same time. We can't mail you out heaps of stuff, but we can bring resources with us when we visit.

We're visiting **Warrnambool/Portland** on Monday, September 9, so if you're in the area and would like to catch up, let us know. Sorry for the short notice; in future, we'll send out updates further in advance.

The easiest way to catch us is by e-mail at ssafe@fpv.org.au, which we hope will be up and running by mid September, or try your luck (we're very busy!) on 03 9654 4766 or 1800 013 952.

Got stuff to share?

In future newsletters we'd love to be able to describe and promote successful strategies that schools are implementing, and resources and activities that you find useful. Send us an e-mail if you've got something you'd like to share....

Do you know about?...

Y-GLAM Performing Arts Project Moreland Community Health Service

Y-GLAM Performing Arts Project is a community arts program for same sex attracted and transgender young people aged 14 to 25. The group meets weekly in Brunswick to learn theatre-making skills and create performances. **Y-GLAM** is currently funded by **Australia Council Community Cultural Development Board** and **VicHealth**. For more information call Jemma, Vicky or Chris on 9355 9900.

Safe and Sound Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service

Safe and Sound is a community development project for same sex attracted and transgender young people in Brimbank. The project consists of **Generation Q**, a weekly social support group, working collaboratively with six local secondary schools to create safe and supportive learning environments and annual community forums and community education initiatives. The project is funded by the **William Buckland, Myer and Reichstein Foundations**. For more information call Jemma on 9364 3200.

Eastern Region Gay & Lesbian Youth Project

The Eastern Region Gay & Lesbian Youth Project is a new initiative that has been funded by the **Department of Human Services**. It's a 3-year project that was an initiative of **SEA (Same Sex Attracted Eastern Action Group)**, and it's one of two projects that's been funded across the state.

The aim of the project is to develop a systematic and coordinated best practice model of service delivery and development for same sex attracted young people across the eastern metropolitan region of Melbourne. A research evaluation will be carried out alongside the

project to determine best models of practice for service development targeting same sex attracted young people.

The project will involve the implementation of community awareness strategies to educate service providers and the community of the issues and needs of same sex attracted young people and strategies to deal with discrimination and homophobia. It will also involve supporting and resourcing schools to develop whole-school approaches to dealing with homophobia and supporting same sex attracted students.

For more information please contact Shelley Walker, Gay & Lesbian Youth Project Worker on 9298 8858 or 0408 689 715, or e-mail to shelley.walker@knox.vic.gov.au.

Pride & Prejudice

Pride & Prejudice is an educational package developed following interest from both educators and the youth sector that addresses sexual diversity and homophobia within secondary schools. The program is a realistic attempt to challenge rather than change student attitudes and beliefs. This involves the provision of accurate information about gay and lesbian people and the opportunity for all viewpoints to be aired safely.

The package includes six session plans with a complementary video that is shown throughout the six sessions. The session plans are quite user friendly, even down to examples of what to say. The video follows six, gay and lesbian young people over six sessions, though they only come out to students during the fourth session. It is a package for those who would not otherwise address these issues in their classrooms without the resources, and not so much for those of us who have been delivering anti-homophobia stuff for years. It's also something that can be done with your students or even staff NOW!

The package is available now - contact Daniel Witthaus on 9243 8793 or dwitthaus@mvcc.vic.gov.au

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