

The Youth Coalition recognises the right of all people to define their own sexuality and believes that young people should be supported in the decisions they make about their own sexuality. However, many young people still experience homophobia and transphobia, which have significant impacts on the health and wellbeing of these young people. The Youth Coalition believes that a whole of community response is required to tackle homophobia and transphobia within society and that it is the responsibility of all people who work with young people to ensure that their services are supportive of GLBTI young people

While statistics on young people who identify as GLBTI vary, a national sexual health survey of Year 10-12 students found 3.3% of young men and 6.7% of young women said they were attracted to the same sex and 1.3% of young men and 2.1% of young women reported they were unsure of their sexuality.¹ Other studies have found that more than half of young people report that their age of realisation of their attraction to the same sex came before they turned 14.² This highlights the need for GLBTI issues to be addressed in schools at an early age.

Many GLBTI young people face discrimination and abuse based on their sexuality. 38% of same sex attracted young people report unfair treatment, 44% report verbal abuse and 16% report physical abuse³ and 74% of all abuse happens at school.⁴ The school environment is one where the majority of young people are required to spend large periods of time and yet over 40% of same sex attracted young people do not report feeling safe.⁵ Schools must be environments where students are free from abuse and the fear of abuse. The Youth Coalition calls upon schools to ensure that GLBTI students feel safe, supported and included in schools. Similarly, the Youth Coalition believes that all environments that GLBTI young people engage must be free from abuse and should be seen by GLBTI young people as inclusive, supportive and non-threatening

The impacts of physical and verbal abuse on same sex attracted young people is significant and concerning. Same sex attracted young people are 3.7 times more likely to commit suicide than other young people⁶ and 35% of same sex attracted young people have thought about or have succeeded in self harming.⁷ Same sex attracted young people who have experienced abuse are more likely to use alcohol and marijuana weekly, tobacco daily and party drugs monthly than same sex attracted young people who have not been abused.⁸ Given the high rates of abuse of same sex attracted young people and the significant affects of abuse of same sex attracted young people, it is vital that the community address the issue of discrimination and abuse for same sex attracted young people.

¹ Anthony Smith et al. (2003) *Secondary Students and Sexual Health 2002* Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health & Society, La Trobe University p2

² L. Hillier et al. (2005) *Writing Themselves in Again: 6 years on*. Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University p22

³ Ibid pviii

⁴ Ibid pviii

⁵ Ibid 49

⁶ Jono Nicholas and John Howard (1998). "Better to be dead than gay? Depression, Suicide Ideation and Attempts Among a Sample of Gay and Straight Identified Males 18-24" *Youth Studies Australia* 17(4) p29

⁷ L. Hillier et al. *Op Cit* p46

⁸ Ibid 44

Issues affecting young people who are transgender (ie. those who identify with a different gender to which they were born) and intersex (ie. those with chromosomes/genitalia which is neither exclusively male or female) may differ from those who are gay, lesbian or bisexual. Assumptions about the sexuality of those who are transgender and intersex may misrepresent the actual beliefs of young people, highlighting the importance of young people's sexual orientation to be defined by young people and not imposed on them. Intersex young people may also face barriers to expressing identity through male and female binaries, which are not inclusive of other understandings and constructions of gender identity. The Youth Coalition therefore highlights that all those who work with young people should be understanding of young people's individual construction of identity and work to ensure that these are always supported and included through their interactions with young people.

The Youth Coalition is also concerned at widespread stereotyping about young people who are GLBTI where young people are categorised by appearance and behaviour, rather than by their own understandings of their sexuality. This is particularly the case for bisexual and transgender young people. Similarly, the Youth Coalition recognises the individual needs of GLBTI young people in accessing services and programs that are exclusively for GLBTI young people and also services and programs that are inclusive and supportive of GLBTI young people, while not being exclusively for such young people. Programs targeted at GLBTI young people should aim to build resilience and strong networks among GLBTI young people.

The Youth Coalition is committed to:

- ◆ Advocating for the development of policies by both government and the community sector which respect young people's sexuality and gender identity.
- ◆ Advocating for the development of policies that enable equitable access for young people regardless of their sexuality.
- ◆ Advocating for the legal recognition of same sex couples.
- ◆ Advocating for schools to address homophobia, transphobia and hetero-normative cultures that lead to bullying and discrimination with schools and
- ◆ Advocating for schools to ensure that same-sex attracted young people are supported by administrators, teachers and support staff who are trained and sensitive to issues affecting same sex attracted young people.
- ◆ Supporting groups and organisations that advocate against homophobia and against all forms of discrimination based on sexuality through education and community awareness raising.
- ◆ Advocating for increased funding and support for services that support GLBTQ young people, recognising that many of these services are currently unfunded and run by individuals which must be made sustainable in order for them to continue to provide an invaluable service to GLBTI young people.