

# **Way Out West: Responding to Western Sydney's Need for Greater Visibility in Youth Centres for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer (GLBTIQ), and Gender Questioning Young People**

**A report by Dimity Kasz**

**Social Inquiry Placement**

**Placement Organisation: Youth Action and Policy Association**

As a subject that gets extensive media coverage and has been at the fore of current affairs issues in recent years, young people who identify as Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex or Queer (GLBTIQ) in Australia are still not seeing the support one would hope to find in a supposedly enlightened and modern democracy of 2011. As part of the Out West project undertaken by the Youth Action and Policy Association (YAPA) and in association with Twenty10, this report hopes to see some funding for necessary training allocated in the youth sector.

The larger goals of this research paper are to alert parties in an influential position for young people to the absolute need for more visibility in accepting GLBTIQ young people. The lack of services provided within the Youth Centres and Services seems almost alarming, given that young people (aged 15-24) make up an average of 15% of the population across several Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Western Sydney ('National Regional Profile 2005-2009', ABS 2010). The project focused on youth services in the greater Western Suburbs of Sydney insofar as their capabilities extend in effectively supporting GLBTIQ young people in a region of Sydney that is particularly known for its diverse cultural and religious composition. LGAs covered include Auburn, Bankstown, Baulkham Hills, Blacktown, Blue Mountains, Fairfield, Hawkesbury, Holroyd, Liverpool, Parramatta, and Penrith.

### Visible Trends

Of the fourteen interviews I undertook - with at least one representative youth worker in each LGA - common threads were drawn in pinpointing why exactly GLBTIQ young people in Western Sydney are not receiving the special care they deserve. They are as follows:

- a lack of understanding of the term "GLBTIQ" and why it is important
- very little to no knowledge of any internal policies and procedures their youth service may have when it comes to bullying, homophobia, or Access and Equity
- little to no understanding of why GLBTIQ friendly spaces need to be visible in their welcoming

- an overarching attitude of “everybody is treated equally, we don’t discriminate,” that fails to address a number of issues relating to GLBTIQ young people (as will be elaborated on further)

Further, of those fourteen youth workers I undertook interviews with, only four placed themselves over five on a scale of one to ten when asked to rate themselves on their knowledge of GLBTIQ young people; where the scale was put to them as “where one represents no knowledge and ten represents frequent contact with GLBTIQ young people, an awareness of current research available, and referrals for local health services in the area.”<sup>1</sup>

In their book *Sexualities and Sexual Identities in Social Work* (2011), Priscilla Dunk-West and Trish Hafford-Letchfield point out that the “varied and diverse feminist and queer movements that have endured throughout the past four decades have, amongst both broad and specific contributions to political and social spheres, ostensibly destabilized traditional norms and values. This has meant that we can now speak about sexuality in a way that is different from previous generations.” (p.3) While this may be true in many sectors of society (and presents rather ideally), throughout the research undertaken for this project; and in a supposedly enlightened age where we find posters for gay safe sex are being banned from bus stops in Queensland (‘Gay safe sex posters removed from Brisbane bus stops’ as seen in the Brisbane Times, June 1 2011), it becomes apparent that for many, talking about sexuality and homosexuality in particular, it is very much not the case, especially in greater Australia and Sydney’s Western Suburbs.

## **The Issues At Hand**

### A Lack of Understanding of the Term “GLBTIQ” and Why It’s Important

---

<sup>1</sup> For full questions and responses, see attached transcript in Appendix

The terms “gay” and “lesbian” are loaded with differing cultural meanings, and throughout some societies are still being used as slurs. While some groups have “reclaimed” these words for their benefit, increasingly the terms “gay” and “lesbian” are not sufficing for the wider community who do not feel completely at ease with the definitions of such words, bestowed upon by a largely heteronormative culture. Teamed with the nature and fluidity of sexuality as we currently understand it, various points have been put forward that call out the terms of using gay or lesbian, stating that they further confuse and stigmatise self-expression (Lovaas and Jenkins 2007).

The interviewee from Blacktown, when asked why she put herself at a one for knowledge on GLBTIQ issues, responded with:

*“I just haven’t had any experience dealing with GLB ... what is it? GLBT?”*  
(pers. comm. 20/04/11)

She is not the only one of the sample, with at least two other LGAs responding with confusion at the term. The representative from Granville had to clarify *“what’s the acronym you’re using?”*<sup>2</sup> The safety of the acronym “GLBTIQ” (also seen as LGBT, GLBT, SSAGQ (same sex attracted and gender queer) in some publications) encompasses each performative dimension of identity whilst also not defining essentialist understandings. Often, the term “queer” is deemed the most non-exclusive for general speech.

Furthermore, Wilton (2000, p.159) has pointed out that as part of professional responsibility to GLBTIQ service users, social workers require two things: “an understanding of the degree to which sexuality is a factor in socio-political exclusion, and an acceptance that discrimination is still widely present in public service provision, [which] become increasingly important in the context of interprofessional care management and delivery.” Based on my own research, a subtle denial of an issue around marginalising GLBTIQ young people prevails in the Western Suburbs

---

<sup>2</sup> “GLBTIQ,” in the first stages of the interview questions, was spoken as “Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transgender Intersex and Queer, or GLBTIQ.”

of Sydney's youth workers, sector which, in turn, results in a failure to recognise these two things.

Many of the younger youth workers who had been in the position one to three years seemed to be the worst offenders in not recognising how GLBTIQ have different needs from a youth service or youth counsellor i.e. "conversations about sexuality and identity may not be seen to be relevant for a heterosexual identifying young person." (Dunk-West & Hafford-Letchfield 2011 p.3). Having even a basic understanding of the social lenses through which GLBTIQ young people are represented and the potential discomfort inherent in such a conversation would go a long way in providing higher quality service, and in a position where the youth service is unable to do so, an awareness of the best places to refer young people onto. Most of the interviewees scaled themselves down for a knowledge rating, in large part for not knowing referral places to pass the young people onto such as Twenty10, the Aids Council of NSW (ACON), or the Gay and Lesbian Counselling Service (GLCS).

Supporting research undertaken by Lynn Hillier (2010) in "Writing Themselves In 3: A National Study On the Sexual Health and Wellbeing of Same Sex Attracted and Gender Questioning Young People" strongly trends towards GLBTIQ young people identifying a gap in their sexual education in school environments and supporting youth services. Many of them openly express a desire to learn about same sex relationships during adolescence not only for the sake of education, but also for more general acceptance and understanding amongst their peers of GLBTIQ:

"Access to information about homophobia and discrimination can assist young people in reframing negative messages about sexual difference and decrease discriminatory attitudes and homophobic behaviour among young people who are opposite sex attracted. It can also allow same sex attracted young people to move from the assumption that there is something wrong with their sexuality to an understanding that *the problem is the reception and treatment of their sexuality within social culture.*" (Hillier et al. 2010, p.81, italics added)

The report finds that amongst young people in schools “44% found their Sexuality Education not useful at all, 40% found it partly useful” and that “there has been no significant development in the provision of information on gay or lesbian relationship safe sex since 1998” (pp:82-84)

Additionally, the youth centres I spoke to had little to offer by way of health education (physical/sexual/mental) for GLBTIQ young people in the programs that they run. The question was loosely put to those working with young people as *“Do your physical/mental/sexual health programs have specific elements relating to GLBTIQ young people?”*

Answers to this question included:

Granville: *“We have had sexual health workshops in the past, but none directed to Gay and Lesbian young people. ... I don’t remember it coming up at all. It’s more generic sexual health stuff.”*

Holroyd: *“Over four terms we’d do relationships, safe sex, drugs and alcohol, then just a mixture of a workshop.”*

“Were there any specific GLBTIQ elements?”

“No.”

“Did it ever come up?”

*“It would often come up, ... and a lot of it was comments that were made like homophobic type comments and we would always tap into that and explore that with them, and try to change their values/beliefs, but yeah.”*

Bankstown: “does it [physical/sexual/mental health program] have specific elements relating to GLBTIQ young people?”

*“That relate to them specifically? No. No.”*

Blacktown: *“No, but if it comes up it would be dealt with.”*

Hillier's research indicates that of the key feature 2010 data overall, "reflected in the sample, was young people's critique of the way their Sexuality Education had a chiefly heterosexual focus and largely overlooked any kind of information around same sex attraction." (2010, p.84) However, it is heartening to see that the evidence points towards young people in youth services bringing up some of these issues themselves, reflecting a gap in the workshops. Auburn Youth Centre, despite facing large opposition from the religiously inclined parents, have made small attempts to include these elements in their workshops.

*"We had a sexual health workshop a few weeks ago ... and we did a condom demonstration, and so we were saying 'it's important to use a condom when you're having sex with a girl or a guy' and the boys were all 'oh that's gross! How could you ever do that with a guy' and that kind of thing ... one boy even said, as were just talking about sex in general, said 'why do people even want to do that [have sex with other men]?' So there's not much knowledge around with the young people about these issues at all. We don't have any resources at the moment, so we're not very well equipped if I could be perfectly honest."*

#### Incidents of Homophobia and Internal Policies relating to Bullying, Homophobia, and Access and Equity

At least five of the respondents (LGAs Bankstown, Parramatta, Holroyd, Fairfield, and Penrith) replied with an awareness of incidents of homophobia at their youth service. For example, Parramatta:

*"There has been amongst the young people ... more in harassment of the gay young person... making fun of them. That sort of thing."*

Holroyd: *"A lot of young people are very homophobic I guess, in a lot of ways. ...I don't think it's an issue around intimidating a young person that walked in, but it's there. I'll often bring it up in general conversation as an educational type thing, And*

*they're just very anti... Merrylands would not be a service that a young person would feel comfortable coming to."*

Fairfield: *"certainly from other young people. We do see [homophobia] from time to time. Nothing major, just a bit of name calling, someone having a bit of a joke. We have a couple of young people who are transgender who come into the centre, and sometimes they'll have a bit of a joke or a stir, or will try and stir them up, or you know, are ignorant. ... it's still very difficult for any young people who identify with GLBT ... there's still the 'job mentality' amongst some young people."*

While the others were not specifically aware of incidents, they also showed a prevailing attitude that would mean they would not necessarily be aware of homophobia even when it did occur in small increments or how to address it. Eight out of fourteen (57%) of the youth services in Western Sydney could not tell me about their internal policies or whether they had anything to do with homophobic issues. The Liverpool interviewee's answer was fairly representative for all of the eight youth centres with a reply of *"I know we do have a policy document. I wouldn't know it off the top of my head though."*

Of all the youth services in Western Sydney, the Blue Mountains LGA inspired the most hope with their comprehensive awareness of GLBTIQ issues, and could go a long way in providing a benchmark for other youth services. *"As part of our basic code of conduct at the youth centre, ... basically it's no racism, sexism, or homophobia."* The Blue Mountains have also gone some ways in providing GLBTIQ specific programs for young people as well as one-on-one support.

As a matter of basic importance, youth workers and centres need to have a clear policy document in place for the incidents of homophobia and bullying that have and *do* come up in their drop-in services and programs, to let the other young people know from the start that making slurs against SSA young people is not and will not be tolerated in spaces that are supposed to provide a support network outside of the conventional institutions of school/home/place of worship (if applicable). Sometimes,



all it takes in a youth centre is more visible support of the GLBTIQ community, by way of displaying stickers, pride posters, and/or leaflets and flyers for information. Such a small action tends to go a long way in indicating to a queer young person that they are in a welcoming space.

ACON, in a pamphlet indicating ways to engage GLBTIQ clients outlines that services should:

- Display educational materials
- Use gender neutral language
- Ensure that homophobic or heterosexist comments are dealt with promptly
- Train staff or encourage external training in issues that face the GLBT community
- Cover GLBT policies in staff/volunteer orientation and training

### The Provision of Care and “Everybody Is Treated Equally, We Don’t Discriminate”

“there is the argument that treating everyone in the same way guarantees equality. Here it is important to recognise the difference between *treating everyone the same*, by offering the same high standard of care to everyone, and *treating everyone as if they were the same*, which is very different. It should go without saying that everyone is entitled to the same standard of care. However, it is impossible to give good quality care by treating everyone as if they were the same. For example, it is increasingly recognised that members of different ethnic groups have different needs, and that treating them all as if they were the same (which generally means treating everyone as if they were a member of the majority ethnic group), results in a poor standard of care.” (Wilton 2000 p.4, author’s own italics)

An over-arching theme that ran through all of the attitudes of the the youth workers and correspondents (with the exception of the Blue Mountains), was no realisation that “equal treatment” does not assist GLBTIQ young people in their varying needs. Largely because “treating everyone the same” does not recognise the different

health issues experienced by some demographic groups and can mean that people fall through the cracks (ACON 2010, "Is Your Service GLBT Friendly?")

Interviewer: "Do you have any particular internal policies relating to same sex attracted young people? So anything regarding homophobia?"

Bankstown: *"No, not from the top of my head. Like I said it's pretty much just the one, on the same level, all young people are treated the same way regardless of race, religion, or sexuality, anything like that, so it's pretty much an even playing ground for all young people regardless of what their preference is."*

Fairfield: *"our youth service has a policy of non-exclusion."*

Many of the responses came as double-barrelled answers as a sort of defence for having no flyers/pride flags/posters up:

Penrith: *"We don't ... the way our service operates is that we're fully inclusive of all people within our age bracket so that's sort of how we promote... we don't have specific programs related to that area, but we're open in the same way as we are with any young person, so hopefully they would feel comfortable."*

This was very much the weakest aspect of all my findings, and necessarily the one that needs addressing most, if for its ability to allow a greater understanding of how youth workers are able to begin to help GLBTIQ young people in what is often a rough period of growing up by realising that there are other and better ways to go about assisting. ACON puts it best by reminding those in the the social services industry that you don't need to be an expert, just "being aware of the impact of sexuality and gender identity can have on an individual's health and wellbeing puts you in good stead to support GLBT clients." (ACON 2010 "Is Your Service GLBT Friendly?")

It is without a doubt that most, if not all respondents to the interviews have nothing but good intentions in wanting to help GLBTIQ young people, and a general lack of resources and training in the industry has been a great liability to further understanding and possibility of breaching the subject. Thus what may be seen as a

minor and unnecessary addition to a youth service - such as flyers promoting and welcoming young queer people, gets overlooked because it should only *“be filled if we are seeing a need”* (Bankstown) for that group, while that sort of approach does little but encourage a “don’t ask don’t tell” culture.

The evidence of the culture is in the results: many respondents claimed that they were not aware of any GLBTIQ young people who attended their youth service at all, and Wilton (2000, p.7) makes clear that “if you genuinely believe that you have no lesbian or gay service users, you are unlikely to perceive the issues as serious or relevant to your own practice, and this in turn contributes to a wider perception of sexual orientation as a marginal issues.”

### The Western Suburbs

Lastly, it is impossible to speak of Sydney’s Western Suburbs without mentioning the incredible cultural diversity that exists there. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (‘National Regional Profile 2005-2009’, ABS 2010) puts many of the LGAs with a little less than half of their population born overseas; largely in South-East Asia, the Middle East or North Africa, resulting in an incredibly varied melting pot of religions and beliefs. Some of the youth workers, as a result of this, came against strong opposition to their attempts at improving their youth service for GLBTIQ specific needs (see Auburn interviewee who ran into some trouble from parents) in broaching what the Auburn youth worker noted as *“a real cultural silence about that kind of thing here.”* and a Blacktown interviewee deemed *“being quite dominantly conservative.”*

The amount of faith based youth centres in the Western Suburbs is further testament to the mixed beliefs of the region, and while my sample did not include any overtly affiliated groups, the lack of visibility for support amongst GLBTIQ young people does not seem to be a lot.

## Where To Start

While trying to reconcile religious beliefs of older generations with an acceptance of queer identity amongst young people is not likely to be conquered by youth workers and services themselves anytime soon, it is possible for a greater amount of support to exist in the greater Western Suburbs of Sydney, and to construct safer spaces for GLBTIQ young people in the area. As it is, those who openly and visibly identify as GLBTIQ seem to be travelling the distance to inner city services for the assistance they require: and while the initiative taken on by themselves is admirable, ideally they should not have to cross eight suburbs to receive that level of care.

Simple messages of “we are queer friendly” are often communicated with the simplest means: pride stickers, posters, pamphlets. Even better, a basic knowledge bank or on-hand referral guide for youth workers can make a world of difference to a GLBTIQ young person in need of care. Research suggests (ACON, Hillier) that GLBTIQ young people are more exposed to health risks (physical/mental/sexual) than young people of a heterosexual persuasion, which should only increase the stakes for necessary and basic training for youth workers in assisting this group. Minimally, written internal policies for the explicit protection of GLBTIQ young people should be implemented, and in the case of particular youth services being unable to assist a young person due to lack of resources or training, an awareness of the closest or most helpful body to refer on to should be de rigueur. With these small additions, an attitude shift just might be in the making.

## References

ABS 2010, 'National Regional Profile 2005-2009', Australian Bureau of Statistics, viewed 04/05/11

<<http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/nrmaps.nsf/NEW+GmapPages/national+regional+profile?opendocument>>

Calligeros et al 2011, 'Safe Sex Ads to Be Re-instated' (at time of viewing: 'Company defends decisions to remove safe sex posters'), Brisbane Times online, June 1 2011, viewed 01/05/11, <<http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/queensland/company-defends-decision-to-remove-safe-sex-posters-20110601-1ff7u.html>>

Hillier et al 2010, *Writing Themselves In 3: The Third National Study on the Sexual Health and Wellbeing of Same Sex Attracted and Gender Questioning Young People*, Australian Research Centre In Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University Melbourne

Lovaas & Jenkins 2007, *Sexualities and communication in everyday life: a reader*, The University of Michigan, United States

Wilton Tamsin 2000, *Sexualities in Health and Social Care: a textbook*, Open University Press, Great Britain

## **Appendix 1**

List of Acronyms:

GLBTIQ: Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transexual Intersex and Queer

GLBT: Gay Lesbian Bisexual and Transgender

LGBT: Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender

SSAGQ: Same Sex Attracted and Gender Questioning

SSA: Same Sex Attracted

ACON: Aids Council of New South Wales

GLCS: Gay and Lesbian Counselling Service

LGA: Local Government Area

YAPA: Youth Action and Policy Association

## Appendix 2

### INTERVIEWS WITH YOUTH WORKERS 20/04/2011 TRANSCRIPTS

\*all names of interviewees and youth services have omitted for the sake of privacy

#### **Suburb: Green Valley LGA: Liverpool**

“How long have you been a Youth Worker in this LGA?”

*“Just over one year. A year and three months.”*

“On a scale of 1-10, how well would you rate your knowledge of GLBT young people, where one represents no knowledge and ten represents frequent contact with GLBT young people, an awareness of current research available, referrals for local bodies in your area to help them out.”

*“It would probably be a two. I don’t think as yet I’ve come across a GLBTIQ young person that fits in that category. I have a small knowledge on it, but it’s not too extensive.”*

“How well equipped do you feel that your service is for working with GLBTIQ young people?”

*“Probably not as equipped as perhaps we should be. In our centre we do welcome everyone and anyone from all cultures, races, religions, and whatever their background may be. But I’d say that if it came to a personal one-on-one working with them [GLBTIQ young person], we wouldn’t have that kind of structure there to support them.”*

“What about the layout of the youth service itself? Are their flyers, pride flags, safe spaces set aside at all?”

*“We do have flyers. We’re a drop in centre so we try and make the whole centre a safe space. We do welcome anyone, but we do have the flyers here as well. Yes.”*

“Are you aware of any past incidents of homophobia in your youth centre?”

*“No.”*

“How visible do you feel the GLBTIQ young people are at your youth service? Or do you have any openly same-sex attracted young people there that you’re aware of?”

*“No, we don’t.”*

“What about any internal policies relating to these issues? Anything regarding incidents of homophobia, bullying, Access and Equity, if they were to come up, for GLBTIQ young people?”

*“I know we do have a policy document. I wouldn’t know it off the top of my head though.”*

“Has your youth service previously run any specific programs for GLBTIQ young people?”

*“We ran an anger management and bullying program, which I think did cover a little bit on GLBTIQ. I think there were about 12-15 participants in that.”*

“Has your service ever partnered with a GLBT service, such as ACON, Twenty10 or local health service?”

*“No.”*

“What about health education and health promotion at your youth centre, physical sexual and mental? Does it include GLBTIQ elements?”

*“No, it doesn't actually.”*

“Is there anybody in your team who openly identifies as SSA that you're aware of?”

*“No.”*

### **Suburb: Blacktown LGA: Blacktown**

“How long have you been working in your LGA?”

*“About 2 years”*

“On a scale of 1-10, where would you place yourself on knowledge regarding GLBTIQ young people?”

*“Probably a 1”*

“Why is that?”

*“I just haven't had any experience dealing with GLB ... what is it? GLBT?”*

“Is your youth service GLBTIQ friendly? Do you have posters up, pride flags or flyers? Are SSA young people listed as a client group?”

*“No, not flags. We have a poster for our youth service stating that we accept all types of young people, from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds though. We don't specify.”*

“How visible are GLBTIQ young people in your service? Are there any SSA young people there?”

*“No.”*

“Are you aware of any incidents of homophobia at your service? Do you have any internal policies relating to homophobia or bullying of this kind?”

*“I've never seen homophobia here. We have a guideline statement but nothing referring specifically to those young people. Like I said we're open to people from all backgrounds.”*

“Have you ever run GLBTIQ specific programs or partnered with a GLBTIQ service such as ACON or Twenty10, or a local health service?”

*“We have with a local health service, they've run a health promotion workshop here.”*

“In your workshops relating to mental/physical/sexual health, are there any elements specifically designed for GLBTIQ young people?”

*“No, but if it comes up it would be dealt with, it's run by a health professional so they would know what to do.”*



“Do you have anything else to add to that? Would you like to see a training program in place?”

*“I’m always open to any type of professional development opportunities, so I think it’s worth while.”*

### **Suburb: Cabramatta LGA: Fairfield**

“How long have you been a youth worker in your LGA?”

*“Now you’re going back! Probably about seventeen years.”*

“On a scale of 1-10 how would you rate your knowledge regarding GLBTIQ young people where one represents no knowledge and ten represents frequent contact with GLBT young people, an awareness of current research available, referrals for local bodies in your area to help them out.”

*“Probably about a seven, or an eight ‘cos there’s not much out west or out this way for those target groups.”*

“How well equipped do you feel personally in dealing with GLBT young people? And what about your service?”

*“I’m confident with it. And our service, we’re open. Our youth team actually has a non-exclusion policy.”*

“So is the youth centre: how GLBT friendly would you consider it? How visibly friendly to GLBT young people is it i.e. do you have pride posters, flyers?”

*“Well we’re not actually a youth centre, we’re based in a building within Cabramatta community centre and the youth team is a division of it. But we have posters up and when we get flyers we stick those up as well.”*

“Have there ever been any past incidents of homophobia at your youth centre that you’re aware of?”

*“Probably not. Because basically most of the young people who come through here into the youth team, as soon as you come through, everyone is equal.”*

“Are you aware of same-sex attracted young people at your youth centre? How many would you estimate it at?”

*“Oh yeah. That would probably be hard [to estimate] because it just depends.”*

“You were saying something about an internal policy regarding same-sex attracted young people. Do you have something specifically related to homophobia, bullying, and Access and Equity?”

*“That would be under our centre policies, yes.”*

“Would you mind elaborating on that at all for me?”

*“Oh, I’d have to go in and look at all the policies sort of thing. But in terms of it, I know there is definitely a non-bullying policy. We have it in all of our camp and excursion policies. I’m trying to rack off the back of my brain where the policies would actually be.”*

“While you think about that, has your youth centre previously run any GLBTIQ specific programs?”

*“No we haven’t. Probably years ago we actually tried to set up one in the centre, and that was same-sex, for the indo-chinese, but that didn’t go off too well because of the location. It was aimed at Indo-Chinese young people, and they just felt that having it at Cabramatta, the community talks - so if anyone saw someone walking into a meeting they’d have people go back and ask their parents and stuff.”*

“Do you see/think that there’s a problem there? Would you have liked to run that regardless?”

*“We would have liked to run it regardless there, but basically all we did was move it to another location, and for about six months I think same-sex people were attending.”*

“Has your service ever partnered with a GLBTIQ service such as ACON or Twenty10?”

*“Probably ACON and that would have been through my Youth Development Councillor that I have here.”*

“Have many times have you personally provided services to GLBTIQ young people?”

*“That’s hard, because we can have anything from 15-25 young people passing through here a day. My staff are in frequent contact with them.”*

(Interview ends when I ask to speak to staff and I explain it would be best to speak to people dealing directly with GLBTIQ young people.)

### **Youth Officer LGA: Blacktown**

*“In terms of services that access Gay and Lesbian young people really well, I’d say that there’s nothing in our area. We’re pretty crap at that.”*

### **Suburb: Bankstown LGA: Bankstown**

“How long have you been working as a youth worker within your LGA [Bankstown]?”

*“For about three years now.”*

“On a scale of 1-10 how would you rate your knowledge of GLBTIQ young people, where one can be little to no knowledge and ten represents frequent contact, awareness of research...”

*“I’d give myself maybe a three, because even though I don’t interact with that many gay and lesbian young people, the times that I do I’m fairly careful, fairly sensitive to the issues that they face, but the only think that I would say I’m not experienced at is working with them one-on-one, case work, knowing the issues that they face, It’s usually just sort of bumping into them every now and then and that’s pretty much it. There’s no intensive relationship that you form with a young person that gay or lesbian.”*

“And what about your service in general? Do you feel that it’s GLBTIQ friendly?”

*“Look, we accept all young people. With the whole discrimination and stuff like that we have zero tolerance, so when we do have, on very rare occasions, the gay and lesbian young person that does come in, I would say that even though some*

*young people do sort of feel uncomfortable, we as workers do maintain the same level of awareness and relationship with them.”*

“How visible is it in your youth centre that you are GLBTIQ friendly? Do you have pride flags up or posters around?”

*“I think we might have one poster. We used to have little cards that we used to keep - I don't know if we have them any more, we had them around for ages. It was a - don't know the name of it now - but it was a support group for gay and lesbian and transgender young people. But I don't remember the title. I mean it's visible, but noone really sees it that would benefit from it.*

“Are you aware of any past incidents of homophobia at your youth service? From the young people or anything else such as workers?”

*“Some of them [young people] make the occasional remark or comment, but as far as any trouble or I guess hostilities inside the youth centre, no, none of that. Just you know kids being kids and being disrespectful every now and then, but obviously we would pull them up. But that's all we can do really.”*

“Do you have any particular internal policies relating to same sex attracted young people? So anything regarding homophobia?”

*“No, not from the top of my head. Like I said it's pretty much just the one, on the same level, all young people are treated the same way regardless of race, religion or sexuality, anything like that, so it's pretty much an even playing ground for all young people regardless of what their preference is.”*

“What about bullying, do you have an internal policy for that?”

*“Well at our youth centre we have a list of rules that stem from our policies and procedures which pretty much means there's to be no bullying, no harassment, none of that in any kind.”*

“Is there anything in that relating specifically to GLBTIQ young people?”

*“It does refer to race, sexuality. I'm pretty sure it refers to sexuality, but it doesn't specifically say homosexuality or anything like that.”*

“How visible do you feel GLBTIQ young people are at your youth service? Are you personally aware of SSA young people at your service?”

*“Not very visible at all. I have personally encountered some, but they don't come to the youth centre anymore.*

“Why is that, do you know?”

*“I don't know really, they just don't come down anymore... they were transgender young people, and they came around for a few weeks and then they just pretty much stopped coming. I wasn't aware of any reason that they stopped coming because of the youth centre or if it made them feel uncomfortable, I just know that they stopped coming. I don't know what the reason was though.”*

“Have you personally provided services to GLBTIQ young people in the past?”

*[long pause] “No, no I can't say I have.”*

“What about your youth centre in general, has it ever run any GLBTIQ specific programs?”

*"I've only been here for three years but I'm sure we've run something along the lines of sexuality and homosexuality and just tolerance and awareness. So we always run sexual health workshops and it's bound to come up in workshops and programs and activities."*

"So does your physical/sexual/mental health programs, does it have specific elements relating to GLBTIQ young people?"

*"That relate to them specifically? No. No."*

"Has your service ever partnered with a GLBTIQ service such as ACON, GLCSNSW?"

*"Not that I'm aware of, no."*

"Is there anybody in your team that openly identifies as SSA/GLBTIQ that you're aware of?"

*"No, there isn't."*

"Is there anything you wanted to add to that?"

*"No you pretty much covered everything! I guess our target group hasn't really been that group at all unfortunately. We don't really see... like you said they're not that visible around Bankstown and we haven't had that much interaction with Gay and Lesbian young people unfortunately, it's just like I said, I guess age groups and target groups... completely different."*

"Do you feel that that's a gap that needs to be filled?"

*"I think it should be filled if we are seeing a need. At the moment, because we haven't seen that real need yet, I don't know if it's something we should address on the head right now, but absolutely if the need was addressed and young people were expressing the need and we're hearing stories, and everything like that, definitely we'd address it straight away."*

"Do you think it's possible that the fact that the need hasn't presented itself is part of the problem at all? Because they don't feel comfortable [in doing so]?"

*"It's possible, absolutely. It's possible."*

### **Suburb: Auburn LGA: Auburn**

"How long have you been working within your LGA?"

*"About one year now."*

"And on a scale of one to ten how would you rate your knowledge about GLBTIQ young people where one represents little to no knowledge and ten is frequent contact with young people, an awareness of current research, knowing local referral health places etc."

*"I'd probably say four to five. Speaking just in the context of just this LGA... it's hard to give a short answer for that. There's a lot of cultural issues that prevent young people from talking, not just about those issues, but sort of anything to do with sexuality in general. To the point where Auburn Youth Centre has not historically even broached that topic until last year, and we had to be very very careful in how*

*we went about doing that. I was only very new at the time so it was a very big learning curve for me.”*

“Is that because of parents involved...”

*“... that’s exactly right. And particularly I would say the religious reasons, particularly with the Islamic community and some of the opposition we have found out about. Even just towards doing information workshops on the body and all that kind of stuff.”*

“So they’ve actively rallied against that?”

*“Yes, that’s correct.”*

“So in terms of your youth service itself, would you say that it’s not well equipped at all in dealing with GLBTIQ young people because of that?”

*“Absolutely. I would definitely say that. And I don’t think that’s through any lack of desire on our part. I would love to address that more in the future. And we do little things, like we had a sexual health workshop a few weeks ago - we’ve had two different ones: a boy’s one and a girl’s one, and we did a condom demonstration, and so we were saying ‘it’s important to use a condom when you’re having sex with a girl or a guy’ and the boys were all ‘oh that’s gross! How could you ever do that with a guy’ and that kind of thing. So we view those as sort of conversation starters and to challenge some thinking along those lines.”*

“Oh that’s great. So do you actually have a policy in place if there are any incidents that come up like that? Any homophobic comments or ...”

*“Absolutely, yes. It’s all in our policy and we don’t tolerate anything like that being said. However, it’s easy to tell if it’s coming from a place of bullying or discrimination, or just a general kind of not knowing. And if we, just from using sort of professional judgement sense that it’s from a place of not being exposed to that before or knowing anything about it, then we can use that as a conversation starter, and open it up to the group so it’s not just one person talking about it. For instance, one boy even said, as we were just talking about sex in general, said, ‘why do people even want to do that?’ [have sex with other men]. So there’s not much knowledge around with the young people about these issues at all. We don’t have any resources at the moment, so we’re not very well equipped if I could be perfectly honest.”*

“I guess all of these questions are a little bit more difficult in light of all the opposition that you’ve come against but what I was going to ask next, which be rendered invalid, is that do you guys have a particularly visible stance on being a GLBTIQ friendly space, such as pride flags or posters just so young people could be aware that you’re available?”

*“No, is the short answer again. And it’s something I feel pretty bad about actually. But no, we don’t at the moment. Our policy is written on the wall in terms of the discrimination policies and things like that. We have a sexual health information table with young people’s resources and condoms and that kind of thing, but in terms of any actual signage or posters no we don’t at the moment.”*

"I know you've said you mentioned it in the programs you've run, but on the sexual health information table are there same-sex attracted specific things, as well?"

*"Yeah, there's a magazine that's sort of like a graphic arts magazine that addresses some of those issues, but again, we have difficulty with young people taking some of those resources because they have such an adverse reaction to them."*

"Do you have any openly SSA young people at your youth service that you're aware of?"

*"I'm the youth work co-ordinator, so, no. But that doesn't mean anything. I'm convinced that there are, actually. But no, nobody that's open at the moment. We have another couple of workers here at the moment - Vanessa the councillor, she might be aware, but a lot of who she works with are the same people I work with on the youth programs. As I said, there's a real cultural silence about that kind of thing here."*

"Have you got any ideas on how you could maybe open that up at all?"

*"Um, it would need to be probably a collaborative effort, not just with us, but with some other agencies, and it would need to involve the parents on some level. Although quite how that would work I have no idea."*

*"I probably for one need some more training. I'm only quite new to youth work. In terms of proper youth work I've only been doing it one year, the year I've been in Auburn. So I could absolutely use some more training, which could help."*

"Have you ever had any experiences with SSA young people, or counseling experiences?"

*"No, no I haven't."*

"I suppose this isn't so valid now but I was going to ask have you ever partnered with a GLBTIQ service such as ACON or Twenty10?"

*"Not to my knowledge no. This is all not really looking so glowing for us is it! I do want to fix this situation though, and I was the one that sought out the funding last year for the sexual health workshops, so it was on my mind a lot. So anything that could come of this would be great."*

## **INTERVIEWS WITH YOUTH WORKERS CONT. 04/05/11** **TRANSCRIPTS**

### **Suburb: Dundas LGA: Parramatta**

"How long have you been a youth worker in the Parramatta LGA?"

*"For close to three years now. Three and a half."*

"And on a scale of one to ten how would you rate your knowledge regarding GLBTIQ young people where one is no knowledge and ten is frequent contact with GLBTIQs, awareness of research available, health referral places in the local area"

*"Probably about a four. In the work that I've been doing, I've hardly come in contact with any young person with GLBT. I've got a bit more knowledge, I mean I've*

*got a bit more information, relevant resources if the needs arise to the necessary referral, but I haven't really had any much contact with that young person."*

"How well equipped do you feel your service is for working with GLBTIQ young people?"

*"How well equipped is my service? Not very high, we're probably not going to be fully prepared because we.... [trails off] personall I guess I have not had much full trainign in terms of dealing with GLBT young people and yeah. If there was a bit more training, more affordable training, because in the field that we are working in there's obviously little amounts of money for training."*

"What about the youth centre itself? How GLBT friendly or visible is it that you're GLBT friendly - do you have pride posters, flyers, and safe spaces set out?"

*"Yes, we do actually. Even in our simple flyers that we hand out - this area's actually open to anyone and everyone and we've made it very clear that no-one is going to be put aside or no-one is going to be denied any access of support."*

"Are you aware of any incidents of homophobia in the past at your youth centre? Whether it's from the young people itself or the people working with the young people ... anything?"

*"Not to my knowledge in the last three and a half years, no."*

"Are you aware of any openly SSA young people at your youth service?"

*"Not we're I'm working currently, no."*

"Does your youth service have any internal policies relating specifically to GLBTIQ issues such as homophobia, bullying, Access and Equity, are they outlined at all?"

*"I doubt there is because we're in the process of renewing all our policies as well, so based on what I've seen there isn't any at the moment. No."*

"Do you know if there's a plan for there to be one?"

*"I suppose there will be because we're going to be developing some new plans, and I'm going to be pushing and proposing a few additions and subtractions from the current policies. Yes."*

"Has your service ever run any GLBTIQ specific programs? Or partnered with a GLBTIQ service such as ACON, Twenty10?"

*"Not to my knowledge, no. Not yet."*

"Have you personally provided services to GLBTIQ young people in the past?"

*"On my own personal level, yes, but not in terms of where I'm working because where I'm living... people I come in contact with elsewhere, definitely. But unfortunately not in the work sense."*

"That's interesting."

*"Just where I'm living I've got a neighbor or two that's GLBT. I just provided some kind of help just from having a chat, because that they needed more support."*

“What about health education and promotion at your YS. Do you run a physical/sexual/mental health program and does it include specific GLBTIQ elements at all?”

*“Personally I haven’t. We’re I’m currently working I’ve only started in Feb, but there is a plan for me in July/August it’s NSW Sexual Health Week, I’m actually planning to include all this information and to do a bit more awareness based on all these aspects. But I can’t really say if it’s been done in the past. It may have been done by the former person that used to work here. I’m pretty sure she would have done it in the past.”*

“Are you aware of anybody in your team who openly identifies as SSA or GLBTIQ?”

*“No. Not in my team, no.”*

“Do you think that it’s a symptom of the composition of Parramatta - with all the different religious beliefs, that you haven’t come across any GLBTIQ young people? That it’s quite invisible it seems?”

*“It definitely would appear as if it’s pretty invisible, because it’s chances are that they just don’t want to come out and say anything for the fear of the repercussions and being ridiculed and yeah.”*

“That’s the end of my questions - did you have anything you wanted to add at all?”

*“Well I guess firstly I think if there was a bit more exposure and more acceptance, if someone from council side or someone even from YAPA do a bit more publicity about it. I mean it’s going to be hard for councillors or ministers, for the matter, to accept such issues, but once people see that’s it’s acceptable, that there’s nothing wrong with being GLBT, they are individuals, they’ve got every right anyway. Once there’s more awareness there will be more acceptance.”*

### **Suburb: Granville LGA: Parramatta**

“How long have you been a youth worker in your LGA?”

*“Five years.”*

“On a scale of one to ten, how would you rate your knowledge about GLBTIQ young people where one represents little to no knowledge and ten is frequent contact with GLBTIQ young people, an awareness of the research, local health places to refer people on to etc”

*“What’s the acronym you’re using?”*

“GLBTIQ is Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transgender Intersex or Queer. Quite a long one.”

*“Okay. Yeah ah... ooh. base don working here probably a five. There’s only sort of one known gay young person that we do work with.”*

“Have you been in frequent contact with them?”

*“I see them probably three times a week.”*

“So how well equipped do you feel that your service is in working with GLBTIQ young people in regards to how visible you feel GLBT young people can be. So do you have pride posters up, or flyers, any safe spaces set aside?”



*"We have had flyers up in the past, I haven't had a look lately to see what is around but referring them onto other services... we haven't needed to do it but we know where to go for them, to help them out."*

"So have you partnered with GLBTIQ services such as ACO, Twenty10, GLCS?"  
*"No."*

"Are you aware of any past incidents of homophobia at your youth service, whether it's amongst the young people or the workers.. any such event?"

*"There has been amongst the young people. [I interject: "would you mind elaborating on that a little for me?"] More in harassment of the gay young person.. making fun of them. That sort of thing."*

"Do you have any internal policies regarding bullying or homophobia, A&E so when incidents like that do occur there's..."

*"No, not on paper, but I have had to ban young people and explain to them why we don't sort of accept that kind of behaviour."*

"How did you go about dealing with the incident of harassment?"

*"I took all those involved aside, but not that gay young person at the time, and explained that we don't have any sort of.. don't accept any form of harassment, sexual or whatever, here. And explained that they can't come back for a couple of weeks... that sort of thing. That we'll be coming down harder on you if they did it again and that they had no right in harassing this young person, and just that sort of thing."*

"How many times have you provided services to GLBTIQ young people? Are there any others aside from that one person you mentioned previously?"

*"No there hasn't been any others that have openly told us that they are gay and that we've had to provide service for. The only thing I've really done for this young person that's sort of a little out of the norm is provide him with his own space within the centre and a few of his friends where they feel comfortable enough to perform and do dances and stuff without everyone else looking on. That's sort of the only real thing out of the norm that we've done. Is provide him and his friends with their own space."*

"That's really awesome actually, I feel it's quite important for them to have safe spaces set aside. So do you feel like there possibly could be other young people who are SSA in your youth service that maybe haven't mentioned anything?"

*"Yeah, maybe another two of the guys that come here."*

"Do you run a health promotion and health education programs such as physical/sexual/mental at the youth service, and are there any elements that specifically relating to GLBT young people?"

*"We have had sexual health workshops in the past, but none directed to Gay and Lesbian young people."*

"Do you know if it's ever come up in one of those workshops?"

*"I haven't been involved in all of the workshops, and the ones that I have been involved with have been a while ago. I don't remember it coming up at all. It's more generic sexual health stuff."*

*"The one thing with our centre, it's predominantly males that come here. We have very few girls come through. I don't know if that helps."*

### **Suburb: Holroyd LGA: Holroyd**

"How long have you been a youth worker within your LGA?"

*"14 years"*

"On a scale of one to ten, how would you rate your knowledge regarding GLBTIQ young people where one is little to no knowledge, ten is frequent contact, an awareness of the current research, local referral health places etc."

*"That's a hard one to answer. I would say with contact with young people, it would be around three. With awareness of other services it would be around eight or nine."*

"How well equipped do you feel in dealing with the GLBT young people?"

*"Me personally as a worker? I think I'm reasonably equipped only because I'm an older worker, so being my age, and the years of experience I've had, I think I have that knowledge. But from some of the younger workers that we've got working here, I don't think they'd be as equipped."*

"Regarding your youth service, do you think it's quite GLBTIQ friendly by ways of visibility: do you have pride flags up, posters..."

*"Yes well we have lots of posters up and stuff like that, but I think as a youth service the dilemma you have is other young people. So that would stop the friendliness I think. A lot of young people are very homophobic I guess, in a lot of ways."*

"Are you aware of any incidents of homophobia at your youth service?"

*"We're aware of attitudes of the young people. I don't think it's an issue around intimidating a young person that walked in, but it's there. I'll often bring it up in general conversation as an educational type thing. And they're just very anti. I think that would make our service... because we've got two services here, Merrylands and Greystanes. So the one in Merrylands would not be a service that a young person would feel comfortable coming to. Within a general drop-in type of environment."*

"Are you aware of any GLBTIQ young people at your service, or do you think that they would just not feel..."

*"...I'm aware of a couple. I would say probably three that we access on a fairly regular basis. However when they're at our service, they're not coming, or they don't talk about that side of things. They know I know, but that's it. They don't follow up, they don't want support, they don't want all that sort of stuff."*

"So they don't want total visibility?"

*"No. That's it."*

"Does your youth service have any specific policies relating to GLBTIQ issues?"

*"We would have basic... yeah in regards to being discriminated against, having equal access and stuff like that, but that would be about it."*

"Have you previously run any GLBTIQ specific programs?"

*"Sort of. We've done over the years workshops in high schools, but internally no. But externally through school workshops we've done some stuff like that. It was mainly about awareness to other young people, regarding some of the issues these young people face."*

"What about any health workshops: sexual/physical/mental health?"

*"Again, we do them in the schools. So for many years we did the crossroads program at Holroyd high school, and over four terms we'd do relationships, safe sex, drug and alcohol, then just a mixture of a workshop."*

"Were there any specific GLBTIQ elements?"

*"No."*

"Did it ever come up?"

*"Yes. It would often come up, and we would address it as we were going through the workshops. And a lot of it was comments that were made like homophobic type comments and we would always tap into that and explore that with them... and try to change their values/beliefs.. but yeah."*

"Is there anybody in your team who openly identifies as SSA or GLBTIQ?"

*"No."*

"Have you ever partnered with a GLBTIQ service, so ACON, Twenty10, a local health service that maybe has GLBTIQ specific elements."

*"No. Referral wise, we've referred a lot of parents over the years to Twenty10. Over the years, mainly through our music program, a lot of parents attend the music programs sometimes and over the years a few of them have said "oh he's having these issues, that issue" and they don't know how to deal with it, so I would refer them across. But when it comes to young people, no."*

"Do you feel like the parents are a big barrier in terms of the visibility of GLBT young people in your area?"

*"The parents I've spoken to are accepting, and I think their problem, or their issue, it's not a problem, was I guess dealing with it. And dealing with the young male or female and trying to get an understanding of how they can help them. They were the parents I came into contact with. But it was... how do I put it. It was their lack of knowledge."*

### **Hills Shire Council LGA: Hills Shire (formerly Baulkam Hills)**

"Are you in direct contact with young people?"

*"Yes I am, only when I run certain programs."*

“How long have you been working within your LGA?”

*“Eight months.”*

“And on a scale of one to ten how would you rate your knowledge of GLBTIQ young people, where one is little to no knowledge, and ten is frequent contact, local referral knowledge and up to date with current research?”

*“Probably about three/four. I’m not really sure of the services around this area, or any area to be honest.”*

“So how well equipped would you feel in dealing with a GLBTIQ young person?”

*“I’d feel quite comfortable, but I wouldn’t be able to refer them on because I don’t know any of the services.”*

“What about your youth service itself, do you think it’s quite GLBTIQ friendly, as in it’s quite visible that you guys are open to having them on as a “client.””

*“Well we don’t do one on one services, we provide activities.”*

“Do you have any sort of posters, flyers or pride flags up for SSA young people.”

*“No.”*

“Do you have any internal policies relating to homophobia, or bullying, Access and Equity?”

*“Not that I know of.”*

“Are you aware of any past incidents of homophobia when you’ve been working with the young people, whether it’s amongst the young people or people working with them.”

*“No.”*

“Have you ever partnered with a GLBTIQ service, such as ACON or Twenty10?”

*“Not that I know of.”*

“Have you ever run any specific programs relating to SSA young people?”

*“No.”*

“Have you ever personally provided services to any GLBTIQ young people?”

*“Not really no.”*

“Are you aware of any young people who are SSA within your programs?”

*“No.”*

“Is there anybody in your team who identifies as SSA?”

*“No, not that I know of. My sister is.”*

“Do you run health workshops: sexual/physical/mental health programs?”

*“We personally don’t. HYSN Network do.”*

## Suburb: Mt Druitt LGA: Blacktown

“How long have you been a youth worker within LGA?”

*“Coming up to a year now.”*

“On a scale of one to ten, how would you rate your knowledge regarding GLBTIQ young people where one is little to no knowledge, ten is frequent contact, an awareness of the current research, local referral health places etc.”

*“Probably a five. I have some knowledge and I know where to refer them on if they want some information from co-workers and stuff having conversations, but I put myself at five because it’s not like I don’t know anything, but I’m not an expert on it so I put myself in the middle.”*

“Do you personally feel quite alright equipped when it comes to talking to GLBT young people?”

*“Yeah, definitely.”*

“What about your service, do you feel that it’s quite visibly friendly to GLBTIQ young people? So have you got posters up, flyers, pride flags?”

*“We have flyers, no flags or posters though.”*

“Are you aware of any past incidents of homophobia at the youth service that you’re working at?”

*“Not that I know of. Sorry.”*

“How visible do you feel any GLBTIQ young people are at your service? Do you know of any openly SSA young people there?”

*“Actually, no I don’t.”*

“Are there any internal policies that you have relating to GLBTIQ issues, so anything on homophobia, bullying, Access and Equity?”

*“I know there’s stuff on bullying. I’m not sure that there’s anything on homophobia.”*

“Have you ever run a specific GLBTIQ program?”

*“Not a program, but we’ve touched on it in our supervision sometimes.”*

“Have you ever partnered with a GLBT service such as ACON or Twenty10?”

*“I have not but I know my co-workers in this service have.”*

“Have you personally provided services to any GLBTIQ young people?”

*“Not that I know of. It’s not really a question that I come up with straight away, to find out whether or not they’re gay or lesbian or.. sorry I can’t remember the whole acronym so..”*

“What about any health education or health promotion workshops you guys might run? So anything regarding physical sexual or mental health at the service, do you know if there are specific elements relating to SSA young people?”

*“Do we do any of that stuff? We don’t at the moment but I know we are looking into partnering with a few organisations to do stuff like that in the future.”*

“Are you aware of anybody in your team who identifies as SSA?”

*“No.”*

“Is there anything you wanted to add regarding young people, and just the visibility of being GLBT...”

*“Yeah, there was a conversation that came up between a few of the workers here at the service, we just mentioned that it would be hard if you were a young person within the.. within the Mt Druitt area to kind of identify themselves as a gay or lesbian or transgender or bisexual young person just because of the culture. The cultural aspect, in terms of being quite dominantly conservative. So the conversation was we couldn’t imagine how difficult it might be for a young person who might be GLBT for them to speak up. That was one of them comments that we were discussing: how do we facilitate, openly make that a conversation where people here can have that conversation.”*

“Have you had any opposition from parents in particular in the past that might be related to that?”

*“I have not, because it’s not related to.. it’s a bit difficult because it’s not really a question that comes up straight away. I’m the outreach worker here, and my first sort of initial response is to build rapport with the young person, so I don’t sort of go up to a young person and ask them. And it’s a bit hard for me to gauge whether or not they are, so with some of those questions I’m not sure if I have worked with a young person who is gay or lesbian, because it’s not really a question I can ask them straight away. So I’m sure there is a lot of young people who are gay and lesbian in the area, but there’s not an avenue for them to voice that in the community, that I know of.”*

### **Suburb: Katoomba LGA: Blue Mountains**

“How long have you been a youth worker within this LGA?”

*“Three and a half.. four... four and a half years? Maybe? I’m just trying to think of all the projects I did before I got this job [laughs]*

“On a scale of one to ten, how would you rate your knowledge regarding GLBTIQ young people where one is little to no knowledge, ten is frequent contact, an awareness of the current research, local referral health places etc.”

*“I’d give myself about an eight”*

“So you personally feel well equipped in talking to GLBTIQ young people?”

*“Yes I do.”*

“What about your service itself, is it quite GLBTIQ friendly, so is it really visible that you guys are welcoming?”

*“Yeah, I have posters on my front windows, there was a rainbow flag sticker but it’s getting a bit old and daggy now. Yeah, it’s quite known that I’m quite welcoming.”*

“So, are you aware of any past incidents of homophobia at your youth service?”

*“Nothing major. There’s always the small incidents of homophobia, like someone will say “that’s gay, this is gay” etc, but nothing major that I’m aware of in the recent past, so no.”*

“Somebody mentioned to me that a couple of years ago you guys came up against some opposition from parents about a flyer/poster that you put up for a program that you were going to run, for young lesbians I think, and it said something about ages 12-24, and parents got into a big hoo-ha about it?”

*“That was a fair few years back now. That was pre-me. I think a lot of the issue that comes around that, is that community understanding still doesn’t think a twelve year old can know their sexuality, which of course is rubbish, but what we’ve tended to do to sort of curb that in a way, is we advertise my programs as such as 16 and over, because that’s consensual. 16-24, but the concerns were also around having people in the twenty-something age group in with twelve year olds, which in itself is its own concern, whether it’s gender specific or not services. I try to do my best to avoid that anyway, 12 year olds in with 24 year olds. It’s two completely different sets of needs, doesn’t matter what the sexuality is.”*

“So do you guys have specific policies relating to GLBTIQ issues, so anything on homophobia, Access and Equity, bullying?”

*“As part of our basic..., even just our code of conduct at the youth centre, part of it is.. I’m just looking at it right now. I know this thing backwards but I cannot find it today! Basically it’s no racism, sexism or homophobia.”*

“I’m just going to run through these questions even though I believe you’re quite well organised in regards to this: but have you run any GLBTIQ specific programs at your service?”

*“Well I run my group... once a month the warehouse comes up, and the program which is usually around sexual health etc etc, warehouse kind of gigs. And we run, every other fortnight, we run a social say, which is myself and a volunteer, and we usually attract, sometimes we get lower numbers, like 3 or 4, up to about 8, and with that, with the social say we usually get pieces together to enter into BENTA and stuff like that. Because we found that having the monthly thing wasn’t enough, they lose focus. And they also want to have some fun, not just sit there and talk about serious stuff. But that’s been running now for a year and a half maybe. And the numbers fluctuate sort of up and down, and we sort of get different levels of support through the community.”*

“Well it’s good that there is some support there as opposed to maybe complete opposition.”

*“No no I have never come up against that luckily.”*

“I’m guessing you have provided services to SSA young people quite frequently?”

*“Yes. It’s always been a... one-on-one support I’ve been doing for a long time with a lot of our clients, and we just sort of identified the need in the community and so, sorted out a group.”*

“That’s really excellent. You definitely seem sorted out of some of the LGAs I’ve spoken to.”

*"Yeah, it's definitely a different set of needs that come up as a team. We try to represent everyone we can in our community. So yeah."*

"What about any other youth services up in the Blue Mountains area? Are there any or are you guys the main..."

*"Well there are other youth services. We're the main one because I work for the Mountains Youth Services Team, and there's also mid-mountains youth centre, and they don't have any specific programs but are aware of mine, and refer onto mine if need be. We work quite closely, you know, it's a pretty small mountain really. [laughs] We all work quite closely together. But we're also working in conjunction with people like the Soul Project, and other projects. We're trying to get a bit more community wide now, like with BENTA and Idaho Day and stuff like that."*

"Is there anything you'd like to add?"

*"No.. not really. I think it's great that someone's looking into this and hopefully you know, more funding can be found. I know the warehouse is constantly have to review and influx, so some stable funding would be great."*

#### **Suburb: Cabramatta LGA: Fairfield**

"How long have you been a youth worker in your LGA?"

*"In Fairfield, 20 years. And I did work in Liverpool for a couple of years before that."*

"On a scale of one to ten, how would you rate your knowledge regarding GLBTIQ young people where one is little to no knowledge, ten is frequent contact, an awareness of the current research, local referral health places etc."

*"I'd put myself right up there at about an 8. We see a few of all sorts of those young people here."*

"So you feel quite comfortable in talking to GLBTIQ young people?"

*"Oh absolutely."*

"And what about your youth service - do you think it's quite GLBTIQ friendly?"

*"Well we certainly aim to be, and we certainly don't discriminate. In fact our youth service has a policy of non-exclusion."*

"So is it quite visible that..."

*"Oh yeah we have posters etc for gay and lesbian youth services. Twenty10, youth refuge and a whole lot of other stuff."*

"Are you aware of any past incidents of homophobia within your youth service?"

*"Let me think... you mean by staff or other young people who frequent the service"*

"Young people, staff, between anyone really."

*"not so much staff. But certainly other young people. We do see that from time to time."*

"What kind of incidents?"



*"Oh you know, nothing major, maybe just a bit of name calling, or someone having a bit of a joke. We have a couple of young people who are transgender who come into the centre, and sometimes they'll have a bit of a joke or a stir or will try and stir them up, or you know, are ignorant. Because here in Cabramatta we have a lot of refugees and new arrivals, so some are not familiar, you know what I mean. It's something quite obscure. For them they've had very little exposure to it, but nothing that's ever caused us a problem or a serious problem or anything, no."*

"So how do you generally go about handling those? Have you got an internal policy specifically referring to incidents of homophobia or bullying, or have you..."

*"Oh just in regards to discrimination and open access into the centre. So there are, we have fairly extensive policies when it comes to Cabramatta Community Centre because we are quite a large community based organisation - we employ over 250 staff and the youth team is just one division of the centre, but yes we certainly do, and we would address that individually with the young people as well as sort of debrief the person who may have been victimised. But as I said it's never been to any great extent where we've had arguments or people screaming or fighting or people wanting to take the fact that someone said something any further. In fact I don't recall us ever having to do something like that, we tend to jump on that stuff pretty quick."*

"So GLBTIQ young people at your service are generally quite visible? You were saying you had some transgender..."

*".. some yes. Some are. But others certainly not. In fact some others go to lengths to possible disguise that."*

"Just amongst the young people or would they confide in you or some of the other youth workers?"

*"well, hopefully. My position here is as youth councillor so I guess I get told the secrets if I can put it that way, in a lot of cases. Also we have a specialist young women's worker here, Karen, and likewise with many of the young women here she might work with would disclose that. Some are openly lesbian, others are not."*

"Have you ever run any GLBTIQ specific programs?"

*"Yeah we have over different times. We've used the HOT program to address different things, we've also used some of the publications through Street Wise or whatever they call themselves now, I'm old so hahaha. But yes we would use those from time to time if they thought that was necessary, we also will include those people in other programs that we run which are mixed. Mixing with people who do not identify that way, and we've never had too many problems in that regard, in participation or in regards to the running of the program, so."*

"Do you run sexual health workshops or physical/mental health workshops?"

*"Do we run them? Uh, no. Well we would from time to time, but it would be depending on what it exactly what it was that we wanted to do, but we would get some specialist in to help us with that. Either through the health team, or I work rather closely with the child natalis [??? I cannot understand what is being said here] at mental health service over here, but we would sometimes, actually we're very fortunate because one of the psychiatrist's in that team specialises in gender*

*identification issues, so I suppose we're in a unique position where we have direct access to a psychiatrist who specialises in that."*

"Do you know if those workshops have, just generally speaking, specific elements of GLBT kind of issues?"

*"It would certainly be one of the things that I canvassed, but when we get these sort of young people, we try and provide as much information about a broad range of issues as we can, but certainly that's a significant one and that would always be included. Likewise about information about STIs and you know, a whole range of other risk-taking behaviours. You know what I mean, in heterosexual relationships to. Just as much information as possible I suppose."*

"Have you found any particular opposition, whether it be from the parents or the general community?"

*"No, no I haven't. Look, it would be ridiculous for me to say that homophobia doesn't exist out here, because it certainly does. But what I've tended to find over my years of experience is that that phobia is based mainly in ignorance, and once, there's an understanding and you know what I mean, about what that is for this person, we tend to.. it tends not to go anywhere. And in fact as I say we've often got young people who identify openly identify as being gay or lesbian here, and don't necessarily have any problems with the other young people who frequent the centre."*

"That's wonderful. That's my entire list of questions covered, but is there anything at all you wanted to add to that?"

*"Just that, I would say in general, it's still very difficult for any young people who identify with GLBT - I don't want to try the acronym I'll probably get it wrong, but we would and it;s still quite difficult for those to come out, because there is some sort of ignorance that still certainly exists. And homophobia that exists, but I think here at the centre people generally, particularly those people, identify that this is a safe place, and that they can be who they need to be while they're here. But I still think that yes, it's still quite difficult for many of them to actually come out. And you know there's still the job mentality amongst some young people, and some kids I've seen for example have disclosed to me about their sexuality or that in fact they are examining their sexuality, and that they don't feel necessarily comfortable in the broader schemes of their life that they're able to come out, or that their may be ignorance from their parents, or maybe some phobic reactions from parents etc, and that's for any young kid any time, whether their parents are supportive or not, it's still a very challenging time for them when they are identifying themselves as maybe being a little bit different to everybody else."*

### **Suburb: Nepean LGA: Penrith**

"How long have you been a youth worker in your LGA?"

*"Ummm, for this job, approximately eight years. But I've been a youth worker prior to that, I had a community development job prior to that for ten years, and prior to that I was in youth refuges and a youth development worker for eight years I think."*

“So you have quite a lot of experience in the area. On a scale of one to ten, how would you rate your knowledge regarding GLBTIQ young people where one is little to no knowledge, ten is frequent contact, an awareness of the current research, local referral health places etc.”

*“I’d say about a six or seven. I don’t have frequent contact. I have had a work experience student recently who identified as lesbian. I’ve worked in the past with a project that went for four years, the Diverse Sexualities Access Project, and I was on that steering committee, so research papers came across, we set up an LGBT inter-agency for a short while. I just worked with the THOR (SAW?) project putting on a best practice forum for services that work with LGBTIQ young people. So quite a bit of experience around that.”*

“You would say that you feel quite comfortable in talking to and helping out LGBTIQ young people?”

*“Yes. certainly would.”*

“And what about the service itself, do you think it’s quite visibly open to LGBTIQ young people, so ....”

*“... Yep. Made a big commitment to making all our foyers LGBTIQ friendly, putting up posters, we’ve got stuff on same sex DV in you know like toilets and stuff, we’ve got or we used to have the safe home/safe space project but that’s gone now I think. I’ve got quite a bit of resources from the Forum, the new responding to Domestic Violence in the Gay Lesbian Bisexual Trans relationships. So quite confident I guess.”*

“Are you aware of any past incidents of homophobia?”

*“Well I’m now based in Cranebrook, and I know about 15 years ago there was a bashing of a young guy who identified as same sex, and that hit the news and there .. people were charged which was good. He went very public, but I haven’t heard of anything lately. And we do have an open door church around the corner from us and we regularly advertise their contact for young people in our newsletters and stuff.”*

“Are you aware of any GLBTIQ young people at your service?”

*“Well I don’t run a service as such, because I’m a developmental worker. I tend to see kids in the morning at our breakfast program that attend the primary and high school across the road, but I tend not to run groups. I have run a group but that’s an antenatal group, so I don’t meet many lesbian women there, no.”*

“I was about to ask if you’ve run any GLBTIQ specific programs”

*“Yes. Diverse Sexualities Access Project which went for 4 years. It finished up in 2009 I think. It had a project worker, it set up an inter-agency, it produced some best practice resources for services. He did a lot of going of network-y type stuff. I think they held a couple of forums and a couple of trainings, Ready or Not in collaboration with Twenty10 and ACON. It was project work basically, all around LGBTIQs. Interestingly the forum I just went to on inter-sex young people identified - because years ago I heard that inter-sex didn’t want to be lumped into LGBTQ - but at this forum that we recently held for best practice service for service providers, inter-sex young people came along because they believed that the link with the*

*LGBT community was around homophobia. They all suffer the same sort of thing: isolation and not feeling included etc etc, violence towards them."*

"Lots of my questions you've answered in my answers, but are you actually working with young people at the moment, doing one on one services at all?"

*"No."*

"What about any sort of health promotion, so physical/mental/sexual? Or is that all included in your prior..."

*".. what I tend to do is produce resources and I've just produced a card called Talking About Relationships which is around healthy relationships, and unhealthy relationships and respectful relationships, and I've tried to be inclusive of all young people basically. Heterosexual, homosexual. It talks about sex and relationships, the age of consent, contraception, warning signs of an abusive relationships and safety in relationships. I'm currently working on one for young people on Sexting - because you know they can be charged with child pornography etc so that will all be targeted at young people."*

"That's great. I'm basically trying to help to get some funding for less experienced Youth Workers, some training.

[...]

trying to make the Youth Centres out in the Western Suburbs [interjects: more friendly"], yeah so young people don't have to travel so far."

*"Yeah for sure. It's a huge need. I mean, huge. And all youth services should really get on board and be LGBTIQ friendly. Some training to move those attitudes around, if there any attitudes about it, would be great."*

### **Suburb: North Richmond LGA: Hawkesbury**

*[Before interview officially "starts," just after I have explained my project]*

*"As far as I know at the moment, the young people I'm working with, I'm not aware of any of those things that have come up, but I'm happy to help out if that's still relevant... people haven't come to me with any of those issues or anything."*

"How long have you been a Youth Worker in the Hawkesbury LGA?"

*"One year and four months."*

"On a scale of one to ten, how would you rate your knowledge regarding GLBTIQ young people where one is little to no knowledge, ten is frequent contact, an awareness of the current research, local referral health places etc."

*"I would say probably about 5. We've got information here but I haven't received any specific training, I've never had to deal with those issues so I guess I'm sketchy with it."*

"If GLBTIQ young people were to approach you, would you not feel totally comfortable because you haven't received any proper training for it, or any reason in particular?"

*"I mean I would feel comfortable in the same way that I would with any young person, and I'd be happy to work with that person with whatever needs they have and find out the relevant information if I've not got it to hand, and find out the relevant information and find out whatever I'd need to find out."*

"What about your service itself - is it quite visibly GLBTIQ friendly? So do you guys have any flyers out or posters up or any pride flags?"

*"We don't... the way our service operates is that we're fully inclusive of all people within our age bracket so that's sort of how we promote.. we don't have specific programs related to that area, but we're open in the same way as we are with any young person, so hopefully they would feel comfortable."*

"Are you aware of any past incidents of homophobia at all, or any kind of slurs against..."

*"No. Not in the service, no."*

"You said that you weren't aware of any SSA young people at your service?"

*"No I'm not aware of it. I don't know why, I don't know if it's to do with the area we're in.. we've had a couple of people come through but they've not been part of our service, they've been part of a group using the service, but they're young people and they identify themselves in that category. But they weren't using our service directly, they were using our facilities."*

"Do you have any internal policies relating specifically to GLBT issues, so anything about homophobia, bullying, Access and Equity?"

*"We've got a section in our policy regarding inclusivity and non-discrimination, and that includes all that you said with anti-bullying and respecting one another."*

"Have you ever partnered with a GLBTIQ service such as ACON or Twenty10?"

*"No."*

"You said you've never personally provided services to a GLBTIQ young person?"

*"No."*

"Do you do health education or health promotion?"

*"Not a major specific event around that, but we've had contributions to different things. Last year's Unleashed festival was funded by I think it was Healthy Australia, so we had a contribution into that, and we have workshops here every now and then that are all around healthy development of young people, so it's quite holistic in that sense."*

"Do you know if there are any elements relating specifically to gay or lesbian young people or does it ever come up?"

*"It might have come up a couple of times, because some of the young people know people who are. So short conversations have come up, and the young people themselves have a very mature approach to it and they're very inclusive. So that's how they've come up. And a bit of education from my part, a few comments in educating them to be inclusive."*

"Is there anybody in your team who openly identifies as SSA?"

*"No."*