

# Supporting Peer Volunteers Amidst Adverse Public Discourse

## Insights from Living Proud

Sarah Collins (she/her)



**Living Proud**  
LGBTIQ+ Community Services of WA







# Content/Trigger Warning



## Living Proud - LGBTIQ+ Community Services

- Community Events & Education
- LGBTIQ+ Awareness & Allyship training
- Consultancy and policy support
- Capacity building for LGBTIQ+ groups

# QLife – Phone & Webchat



- QLife Telephone and online peer support and referral Service
- Staffed by peer staff & volunteers
- Confidential & **Anonymous**
- 3pm to midnight
  - Volunteer Shifts 6-9pm



## Types of Contacts

- Distressed LGBTIQ+ people
- Family/Friends wanting to offer support
- General Abuse



# Why Peer Support?

- Common/Shared experiences
  - Coming out
  - Experiences of Homophobia/Transphobia
- Guaranteed LGBTIQ+ Friendly Service
- Referral to LGBTIQ+ Competent Services







## How We Do Peer Support

- Different to Mental Health/AOD Model
- Limited self-disclosure
- Anonymity of Peer Supporters

Part of being a Peer is recognising you need all the same supports as the people you are working with



# Anonymity

- Peer Supporter Volunteers cannot
  - Access QLife as a contact
  - Share details of their volunteering with partners, family, friends, etc.



## Peer Supporter Role

Peer work involves the development of reflective abilities and self-awareness, purposeful sharing, awareness of and respect for diversity in experience, and the ability to work collaboratively with others

Trainee – Volunteer – Ratified



## Advantages

- Peer workers report their contributions as rewarding, increasing their sense of purpose and in some cases growing their own personal resilience
- Being surrounded by other peer workers who are like-minded and working in an inclusive workplace can increase peer workers' sense of community and belonging.

*Borthwick, J., Jaffrey, L., Snell, J. (2020). Exploration of peer support models to support LGBTQ+ people with their mental health. UK: Centre for Mental Health.*



## Challenges

- lack of senior peer worker roles and peer supervisor roles
- In relation to providing interventions, three key challenges were identified – blurred boundaries, the need for vast specialist knowledge and triggering of own vulnerabilities
- a peer support context may trigger peer workers – resulting in them having to relive their experiences and feeling confronted by their own anxieties and vulnerability



# Empathy

## Empathy is Selfless

Helpers must put aside their own values, attitudes and feelings to be fully with the contact

**This is a radical commitment**

**It is effortful**

- 🌸 Park your feelings to the side & focus on what the contact needs
- 🌸 Unpack feelings after call/webchat with supervisor



## Challenges

- within LGBTIQ+ peer support, the pressure and need for specialist knowledge and skills to address a wide spectrum of identities and experience can be difficult
- many staff/volunteers will also be taking on a peer support role within their community which could impact burnout.



## Marriage Equality Vote 2017



- 2016 - Government committed to a compulsory national plebiscite
- Unable to get support in the Senate, changed to voluntary postal survey
- MPs were not obliged to vote the same way as their electorates





IT'S  
OK TO  
SAY  
"NO"



## 3 WAYS GAY MARRIAGE WILL CHANGE THE CLASSROOM

### 1. More radical gay & lesbian sex 'education' programs in schools

**If the law is changed to include gay marriage, schools will be obliged to teach gay and lesbian sexual activity in the classroom.**

Radical programs like "Safe Schools" already teach kids about various forms of sexual activity and encourages sexual experimentation from an early age.

Once gay marriage is legalised, programs like this will become widespread and even compulsory as has happened overseas.



### 2. Kids will be taught their gender is fluid

**Once gender is removed from the marriage law it will quickly be removed from the classroom.** Kids will be taught their gender is fluid, something they choose, not something they are born with.

*The Gender Fairy* is a book aimed at Australian kids aged four and up. It teaches children that no one can tell them whether they are a boy or a girl.

Boys who identify as girls will be encouraged to wear girls' uniforms and use the girls' toilets.

In the UK, the Equalities Minister praised easy gender transition as "building on the progress" of gay marriage.

This agenda is already promoted by programs like the controversial, gender-bending "Safe Schools" program and will only become more widespread once the law is changed.

### 3. Loss of parents' rights

**In other countries where gay marriage has been legalised, parents have found themselves in court after trying to pull their kids out of radical gay sex education classes.**

In Ontario, Canada, one parent went all the way to the Supreme Court to get permission to remove his kids from radical sex education classes. The court said the school could override his rights as a parent.

**In some states the gender-bending, so-called "Safe Schools" program is being kept secret so the public won't know where it is being taught.**

Parents are already being cut out of the picture in Australia. Parental consent or even notification is not needed for radical gay sex education programs like "Safe Schools", and South Australian schools are allowed to help a child change their gender even if the parents object.

**Urging Australian to cast a vote and say "NO" to Same Sex Marriage Legislation !!!**

**Homosexuality is a curse of death in terminating the family line and without decedents!**

**The sexual behaviour of anal sex among some homosexuals is one of the main source of HIV/AIDS transmission !**

**Homosexuality is a tragedy of a family, a grave to the family bloodline, a curse of family sonlessness!**



# Same-sex marriage survey sparks spike in access of LGBTI mental health support

Posted Mon 18 Sep 2017 at 9:32am, updated Mon 18 Sep 2017 at 1:14pm

## Study shows same-sex marriage vote damaged LGBT mental health

24 January 2019

But exposure to social support associated with reduced distress

A survey of lesbian, gay and bisexual Australians has shown that exposure to negative sentiment during the same-sex marriage debate led to increased mental stress in the LGBT community.





## Survey by National LGBTI Health Alliance

- Experiences of verbal and physical assaults more than doubled in the 3 months following the announcement of the postal vote, compared to the 6 months prior.
- Depression, anxiety or stress increased by more than a third after the announcement of the vote
- Most respondents said that they experienced negative messages about LGBTIQ+ people or same sex marriage at least daily, especially from online and television media.



## Marriage Equality Vote 2017

- Research by the University of Sydney

“negative messages about same-sex marriage was associated with greater psychological distress for lesbian, gay and bisexual Australians”

“increased exposure to homophobic campaign and media messages was related to increased levels of depression, anxiety and stress among same-sex attracted Australians”



# Protective Factors

- Family & Friends
  - Same-sex-attracted people who believed their close family and friends had voted in favour of marriage equality reported significantly better mental health
- LGBTIQ+ Rights and Mental Health Organisations
  - Same-sex-attracted people who believed they did not have support for marriage equality at home or at work benefited the most from public messages of support.





# Support for Volunteers



Initial Competencies

Regular Check In

Reflective Practice

Volunteer Community





# Initial Competencies

- Intensive Training before Volunteering
- Ongoing Professional Development
- Annual Reflection/Exit Interview Question :
  - What do you wish you had known before you started volunteering?



Most Feared Call Activity



## Regular Check In

- Briefing before Shift
- Support during Shift
- Debriefing with Staff/Ratified Volunteer



# Reflective Practice

- Reflection & Development Sessions
- Individual Reflection after each Contact
- Written feedback and conversation on call logs



# Volunteer Community

- Community of Practice
- Opportunities to Gather with Other QLife Volunteers



# Intellectual Strategies

- Respect
- Unconditional Positive Regard
- Compassion
- Generous Assumptions
- Distancing (?)
- Limits of Control

This requires a high degree of self-regulation and needs to be supported by logistical strategies



# Abusive Contacts

- What is their Need?
- Don't accept the unacceptable
- How is this supporting LGBTIQ+ community?



Comment



Who is saying this?



What do they mean?



What is the need?





# Logistics

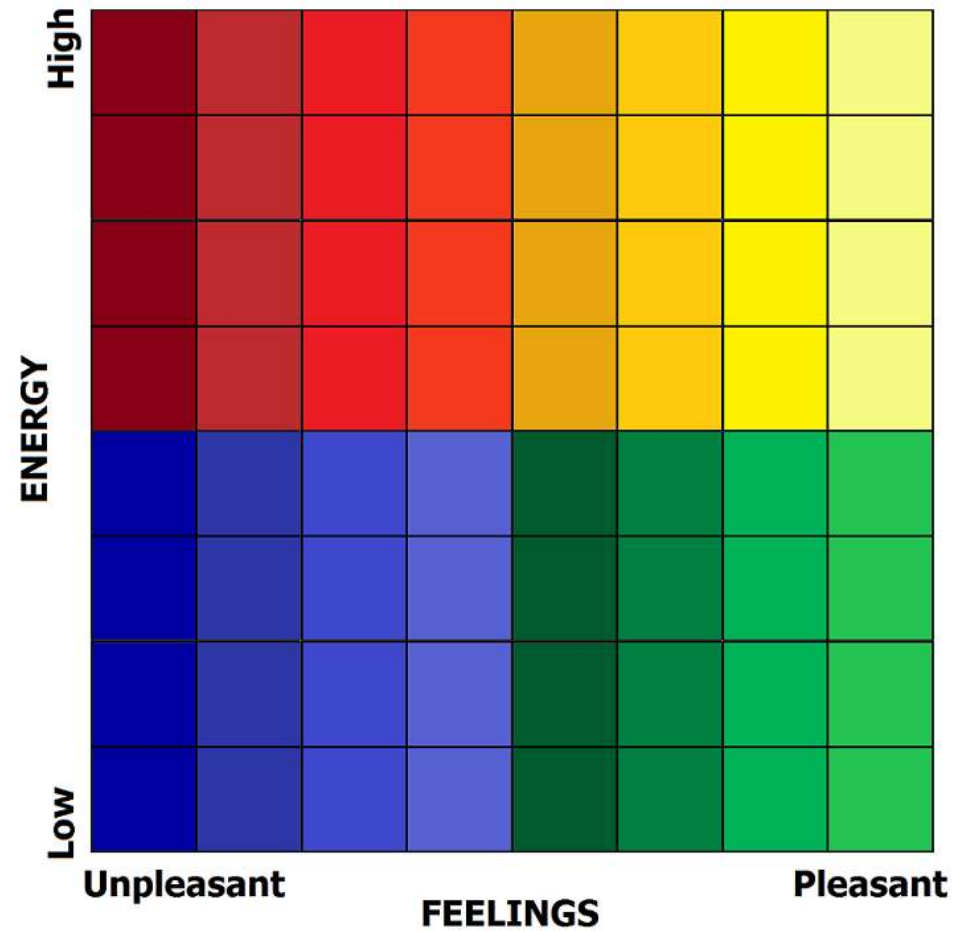
- Planning a shift or workshop
- Taking breaks after difficult calls/chats
- Ego-depletion
- Recognising your triggers
- Co-facilitation
- Ratified/staff available
- Breathing





# Where Are You on the Mood Meter?

- Recognise
- Understand
- Label
- Express
- Regulate



Retrieved from : <http://ei.yale.edu/ruler/>



## Self Care

“**Practice self-care** -- You and your kids don't have to watch every ad or read every news story. You can turn off the TV, and you can walk away from conversations that make you feel unsafe.”

Is this possible for peer workers?



Living Proud  
LGBTI Community Services of WA

Staying strong when listening to  
homophobia and transphobia is  
your job

Sandra Norman & Jaini Shah



## Should the law be changed to allow same-sex couples to marry?



### Overall participation rate for the survey



The Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey was mailed out to **16,006,180** eligible Australians.

**12,727,920 (79.5%)** submitted a response.

Source: Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey, 2017





# One Year On







# What Next?



## Drag queen storytelling event at Maylands library attracts protesters and counter-protesters

By Cason Ho

Posted Sat 17 Jun 2023 at 2:01pm, updated Sat 17 Jun 2023 at 3:56pm





This is an Ongoing Process



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