

SUBMISSION

TO | **Colleen Ross, DCSI**
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TOPIC | **The Way Forward**
- LGBTIQ Report, December 2017

DATE | February 2018

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Summary and Recommendations

The Way Forward provides an overview of the considerable work the South Australian Government has undertaken in recent years to further support the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer (LGBTIQ) community and create inclusive strategies and approaches within Government agencies. Uniting Communities thanks the State Government for their continued focus on the needs of the LGBTIQ community and the engagement that has occurred through conducting the Rainbow Survey and hosting several community consultation events since the 2012 LGBTIQ Inclusion Strategy was implemented.

Despite this, the goal of LGBTIQ inclusion and equality is an ongoing process of continued development. This submission outlines several recommendations that Uniting Communities (and in particular Bfriend due to their direct work with the LGBTIQ community) believes are important to progress the inclusion and equality of the LGBTIQ community. These recommendations are detailed below:

Key Objectives (Government)

Social and Emotional
Health and Wellbeing

Recommendations (Uniting Communities)

Develop a secondary LGBTIQ Inclusion Strategy to guide the implementation of the recommendations outlined in this submission

Assist community service providers to collect statistical data about gender identity and sexuality for people accessing services in order to identify LGBTIQ community needs and assist in the development of future services

Develop LGBTIQ specific health services or member networks so LGBTIQ people can easily identify and access suitably knowledgeable services

Improved provision of support and services for transgender and gender diverse children and their families

Establish a LGBTIQ counselling service or network within South Australia

Assist QLife in establishing a South Australian team to offer telephone counselling support

Remove Gay Panic defence and expunge criminal history relating to homosexuality

Employment and
Opportunities

Expand work hours and geographical locations of existing LGBTIQ services

Locate Adelaide based LGBTIQ specific services within a community hub

Develop LGBTIQ specific services in regional South Australia

Awareness and Education	<p>Establish a regional network for professionals supporting LGBTIQ individuals and their families</p> <p>Deliver LGBTIQ training to all health professionals currently employed within SA Health</p> <p>Develop and deliver specific training on gender diversity for all medical practitioners, psychologists and psychiatrists</p> <p>Offer LGBTIQ training to regional workers in relevant professions</p> <p>Ensure all relevant state based tertiary education courses and facilities include LGBTIQ modules</p>
Inclusive Service Delivery	<p>Continued efforts to ensure Government departments and agencies are more inclusive both for Government employees, and for the South Australian community as a whole</p> <p>Ensure that inclusive service delivery is a priority not just for Government departments, but for non-government services that support the community in areas such as health, aged care, disability care, education and community services</p>
Engagement with LGBTIQ Communities	<p>Continued LGBTIQ community engagement, with an emphasis on ensuring that the diverse voices of the LGBTIQ communities are heard, respected and responded to</p> <p>Change format of IDAHOT celebration from breakfast to evening event and include an element of recognition for community activism/commitment</p> <p>Creation of an LGBTIQ policy team within DCSI to enable the Government to better engage with the LGBTIQ community and to oversee the implementation of recommendations</p> <p>Create a “roadshow” event for LGBTIQ services to engage with workers in regional areas</p> <p>Establish LGBTIQ reference or working group to support the DCSI team in their work</p> <p>SAPOL to consider consultation process to further improve upon current engagement with the LGBTIQ community</p> <p>Reinvigorate LGBTIQ grants but in a new format to ensure financial long-term sustainability of services and community projects</p>

Introduction

We are pleased to provide a submission to the Department for Communities and Social Inclusion's *The Way Forward* report into support for the LGBTIQ community in South Australia. This submission has been made by Uniting Communities on behalf of Bfriend, as the organisation that has housed and proudly supported the service for over 20 years. Input and guidance has been provided by Bfriend community workers based on work related and community based interactions with LGBTIQ individuals, their families and members from the wider LGBTIQ community in both Adelaide and South Australia.

Uniting Communities

Uniting Communities is a not-for-profit organisation working with South Australians across metropolitan and regional South Australia through more than 104 community service programs. At Uniting Communities we work to create a compassionate, respectful and just community in which all people participate and flourish. We are made up of a team of more than 1,500 staff and volunteers who support and engage with more than 20,000 South Australians each year.

Established in 1901, Uniting Communities recognises that people of all ages and backgrounds will encounter challenges in their lives. We offer professional and non-judgmental support for individuals and families around alcohol and other drugs interventions, housing and crises, mental health and wellbeing, individuals with disabilities, respite for carers, counselling and rehabilitation, medical issues, and financial and legal services.

Bfriend

Bfriend is an LGBTIQ specific service that operates within the Adelaide metropolitan area. It was established in 1995 with the purpose of supporting LGBTIQ people who were newly identifying as same-gender attracted or gender diverse, but also their families who were experiencing their own difficulties and sought connection with others for support. This was primarily accomplished by connecting people with volunteer peer mentors, who were able to provide one-on-one support or connections with the broader LGBTIQ community based on their own life experiences and knowledge.

Bfriend continues to provide peer mentor support to the LGBTIQ community to this day. In addition to this, the service operates as an information and support service for the LGBTIQ community by providing one to one support, connections to other services and community groups. Bfriend's staff also facilitate LGBTIQ inclusive practice training both within Uniting Communities and externally, and work collaboratively with other services to ensure the LGBTIQ community is supported.

This Submission

We have structured this submission to respond to the three questions posed in *The Way Forward*:

1. What do you think Government should focus on?
2. What would you like to tell specific Government agencies?
3. What are we doing well?

An effort was made to group these responses based on the five key objectives outlined in the *2014-2016 South Australian Strategy for the Inclusion of LGBTIQ People*:

- Social and Emotional Health and Wellbeing
- Employment and Opportunities
- Awareness and Education
- Inclusive Service Delivery
- Engagement with LGBTIQ Communities

In reality, many of the topics discussed within this submission relate to several of these objectives. For example, increased awareness of LGBTIQ communities leads to more inclusive services, which in turn contributes to better social and emotional wellbeing for LGBTIQ people. This interconnectivity is evidence that addressing any of these objectives can contribute to wide reaching benefits for the LGBTIQ community in South Australia.

Bfriend acknowledges this submission is made based on interactions with LGBTIQ clients and community members in general. It does not represent the entirety of the LGBTIQ community and can only highlight the issues and concerns encountered from the situations experienced by the Community Workers. The LGBTIQ acronym has been used within this submission to represent the collection of gender and sexually diverse groups known as the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer community as a collective. Bfriend acknowledges there are many identities who do not necessarily identify with this acronym for many reasons, and cultural understandings of what it means to same-gender attracted or gender diverse can differ to what is understood by an Anglo-centric understanding of sexuality and gender diversity. Finally, Bfriend acknowledges the term Queer is seen as a derogatory term by many older LGBTI individuals due to the historic use of this word as a slur.

Question One: What do you think Government should focus on?

LGBTIQ inclusive healthcare

Access to healthcare continues to be of concern for many people within the LGBTIQ community, particularly for those who are transgender, gender diverse or have intersex variations.

Several transgender people have reported to Bfriend they feel healthcare professionals lack an adequate understanding of their gender identity. Concerns raised included healthcare providers being dismissive of health concerns, focusing on the person's gender identity rather than the presenting medical issue, using incorrect pronouns or language when referring to the person, or lacking general training and knowledge about gender diversity. In addition to medical professionals, this also seems to be true for those in the mental health system, as illustrated in the case study of Jamie below.

Case study: Jamie¹

Jamie presented to Bfriend seeking information about LGBTIQ inclusive mental health services. They had recently started seeing a psychologist for assistance with suicidal ideation that stemmed from previously diagnosed mental health issues. After a few sessions with the psychologist they disclosed their gender identity, at which point the psychologist focused exclusively on their gender identity as the reason for their suicidality. They felt that the psychologist directed all conversations to the topic of gender identity and ignored their broader mental health issues. They soon felt their sessions were based more on educating the psychologist about gender diversity rather than the psychologist listening to their actual circumstances. This ultimately led to Jamie feeling unsupported, and seeking help elsewhere to better meet their needs.

The above example is not unique. Many within the transgender community refer to this phenomenon as “trans broken arm syndrome”, wherein a transgender person might present with any range of medical issues unrelated to their gender identity (for example a broken arm), but the professional they meet with will associate their condition with, or blame it on, their gender identity. As in the above example, this leads to the professional focusing their attention on the person's gender identity rather than the presenting concern.

A lack of knowledge of transgender health issues has been witnessed by Bfriend in our engagement with other service providers as well. In early 2017, Skylight (formerly the Mental Illness Fellowship of South Australia) established a Gender and Sexual Diversity Mental Health Professionals Network designed to enable mental health workers to attend information sharing and professional development sessions. When surveyed on specific topics they would like to learn more about, a desire to learn more about transgender and gender diverse people was the most common response. This led to two professional

¹ Not the person's real name.

development sessions later in the year, which recorded the greatest attendance for any of the year's bi-monthly sessions.

This desire to know more about supporting transgender and gender diverse people was echoed when Bfriend met with mental health service providers in regional South Australia in mid-2017. These workers indicated an awareness of gaps in their own knowledge and expressed the opinion that local doctors—in particular general practitioners—would greatly benefit from knowledge regarding gender diversity and associated health issues.

People with intersex variations have also expressed a desire for greater knowledge and awareness within the medical profession. Intersex people who Bfriend has spoken with feel that medical professionals are often unaware of intersex variations and are poorly positioned to assist with medical issues related to these variations. Furthermore, they have expressed concerns that this lack of understanding often leads to unnecessary medical procedures being conducted upon intersex children in order for them to have “normal” sex characteristics. The ramification of this is that the gender the child was assigned at birth may not align with their gender identity later in life, which can contribute to greater experiences of gender dysphoria. Unnecessary medical procedures are also reported by intersex people as contributing to poorer sexual relationships later in life, further impacting overall emotional wellbeing.

Beyond the transgender and intersex communities, the broader LGBTIQ community often feels the healthcare systems are overtly heteronormative in nature and fear being open about sexuality or gender identity when accessing these services. Fear of discrimination or stigma also contributes to LGBTIQ people being less likely to seek early support, resulting in poorer health outcomes in the long-term. It should be noted that this fear of discrimination can contribute not just to an unwillingness to access health services, but any service in general.

Recommendation:

Increased LGBTIQ awareness and understanding must be established in all health professions to address the concerns of LGBTIQ community members and to increase their likelihood of seeking medical support in times of need. This needs to be a particular priority in relation to bolstering medical knowledge of gender diversity and intersex variations.

The development of additional transgender specific health services

As outlined above, many transgender and gender diverse people express a concern that medical professionals lack an adequate knowledge of their needs. This is particularly true in relation to access to healthcare for transgender people who are seeking to affirm their gender identity through Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT).

There are relatively few psychologists, psychiatrists and endocrinologists in South Australia who specialise in this area, and many transgender people have reported extensive wait times for appointments to see these specialists. This “bottleneck” scenario comes at the point where a transgender person is often just beginning to acknowledge their gender identity and is actively seeking support.

This can be a particularly vulnerable time for transgender people as they often have many questions about their gender identity, and may be faced with transphobic attitudes from friends, family, in the workplace, or from society as a whole. As a result, it is crucial that support is available in a timely manner.

Recognising this need, community members have developed the Trans Health SA website and Practitioners' List, which provides an invaluable resource to help transgender people find peer-recommended health professionals. Despite this though, many of these professionals still have extensive wait lists, and support isn't available in all areas – a particular concern for those living in regional South Australia. Cost is also a prohibitive factor that can exclude many transgender people from being able to access help when they need it most.

Recommendation:

The development of a transgender specific health service in Adelaide that is accessible and affordable will provide improved health outcomes for transgender people when they most need this support.

Improved services for gender diverse children and their families

Contact from parents of transgender and gender diverse children or youth is often encountered by Bfriend, whether it be directly from the parents themselves or from other professionals supporting them. Until the SA legislation reform in late 2016 regarding transgender health care, support available was very limited and difficult to find. With the exception of Parents of Gender Diverse Children, the GDay Foundation (both volunteer led support programs), Trans Wellbeing, and a small number of psychologists and therapists who support these families, there is little assistance currently available in South Australia.

Bfriend considers this lack of support to be of concern, as many transgender and gender diverse people first recognise their gender identity pre-puberty. If support is available to help them explore and ultimately affirm their gender identity, these young people can flourish. By contrast, Bfriend has heard from several adults who have been unable to resolve the question of their gender identity until far later in life, often with negative consequences, as demonstrated in the below case study:

Case study: Simone²

Simone, a middle aged woman, came to Bfriend to talk about her gender identity and to connect with the transgender community. Assigned male at birth, Simone had lived her life until now as Simon. She had felt like a girl from when she was in primary school, but it was always dismissed by the adults around her and she felt a great need to conform to masculine gender roles. In adolescence she started to self-harm and experienced depression, and later struggled to maintain a relationship as it never felt “quite right”. In the last six months she’d started to learn about gender diversity and what it meant to be transgender, and was now seeking support with the goal of commencing hormone replacement therapy in the near future. For the first time in decades she felt comfortable with who she was and felt her mental health was improving.

Simone’s story is representative of many gender diverse adults who felt unable to affirm their gender identity in their youth. Bfriend has heard from several adults who have shared similar stories involving struggles with mental illness, self-harm and suicidal ideation arising from personal dilemmas surrounding their gender identity that have spanned their life. We consider support for gender diverse children and their families to be a key preventative strategy to foster greater mental health and emotional wellbeing for transgender and gender diverse South Australians.

Additionally, it is important that continued efforts are made to ensure transgender and gender diverse children are protected from transphobic and discriminatory attitudes from other members of society. This is particularly important in schools and social activities that these young people engage in, and we strongly support the continuation of the Safe Schools Anti-Bullying Initiative provided by ShineSA as an example of how gender diverse children can be supported beyond the home environment.

Recommendation:

The provision of more support services for transgender and gender diverse children and their families will result in better long-term social and emotional wellbeing for these young people. It is only through the combination of fostering inclusive communities, educating health professionals, and expanding the services that support these families that gender diverse children will be able to reach their full potential.

Expansion of existing LGBTIQ specific services

Whilst a particular emphasis has been placed on the need for services that support gender diverse children, Bfriend strongly believes it’s important to ensure all members of the LGBTIQ community throughout South Australia have access to services that address their needs.

From general engagement with LGBTIQ community members, Bfriend has been advised that many would prefer to access LGBTIQ specific services if the option was available. The most

² Not the person’s real name.

common reasons include feeling it is harder for non-LGBTIQ people to understand their experiences, fear of potential discrimination, and believing LGBTIQ specific services can provide more culturally appropriate responses to them. Many other community members have also disclosed a willingness to seek support from LGBTIQ inclusive mainstream services, and this will be discussed further later in this submission.

At present, there are very few LGBTIQ specific support services in South Australia. These services are all relatively small, often only employing a small number of staff on a part-time basis. These services are complimented by various volunteer led community groups, but these services themselves aren't always able to meet the needs of those attending or the wider LGBTIQ community in general.

For example, there is a current lack of LGBTIQ specific counselling and mental health services in Adelaide. In the past, Gay and Lesbian Community Services and the AIDS Council of South Australia served as two examples of such services, however neither currently exist. Some mainstream services, such as some Headspace sites, have made considerable efforts to create LGBTIQ inclusive support to meet the needs of this community, however these services aren't accessible to all parts of the LGBTIQ community (Headspace, for example, only assists young people aged 12 to 25). In recent years, MifSA (now Skylight) housed the Queer Connections team which existed specifically to support LGBTIQ people living with mental illness, however the team dissolved in mid-2017 and operates with a lesser workforce. This has severely limited their capacity to support their target group.

Recommendation:

The expansion of existing LGBTIQ specific services would allow for counselling and mental health support (among other things) to be provided by dedicated LGBTIQ services that are already known to this community. It would also enable these services to more easily hear the views and concerns of the LGBTIQ community as a whole and be more responsive to other community needs that are either currently unmet or are yet to emerge.

The development of regional LGBTIQ services

It is of particular concern that, at present, all current LGBTIQ services in South Australia are based in metropolitan Adelaide with no specialist support existing in regional areas. Bfriend, for example, is regularly contacted by LGBTIQ people in regional South Australia seeking support. They report a fear of discrimination and an inability to be open about their sexuality or gender identity within their local community, not knowing what services to seek support from or where to connect socially with others in the immediate area. This commonly contributes to social isolation, poorer mental health and reduced social and emotional wellbeing. Until recently, Bfriend filled this role of being a contact point and travelling to major regional hubs to connect LGBTIQ people and their families, but to also educate and offer training to services in the area.

Data from QLife indicates that SA comprises approximately one third of all regional callers to the service. There are many other indications of LGBTIQ people living in these areas struggling with their sexuality or gender identity, or simply wanting to know if there are others in the same area. Having a regional network and training delivered to services in

these areas would assist in developing safe points of contact for both services and community members. There are many folk known to be living in regional areas; some are connected with others in the LGBTIQ community and some are not. There is currently no method for these individuals to connect with each other unless they out themselves as being LGBTIQ and possibly incur a negative reaction from their local community.

Recommendation:

The development of regional LGBTIQ services would ensure that LGBTIQ people in these areas are better able to seek support and connect with community. This would result in greater community visibility, improved awareness and referral pathways for mainstream services, and would likely contribute to reduced rates of homophobia and transphobia.

Providing a "roadshow" style project would allow members from the few LGBTIQ services in Adelaide to travel to the main regional cities, assisting in the development of more inclusive communities.

The development of a community hub in Adelaide

Even within the Adelaide metropolitan region many LGBTIQ people feel a sense of social isolation. Those who contact Bfriend seeking community connections often remark that they feel the Adelaide LGBTIQ community is very hidden, especially when compared to other capital cities.

Bfriend has taken some steps to address this, with an *Adelaide LGBT Events* website being created to offer a digital calendar and information source with details of known community groups. This information has always been provided by Bfriend and formed an integral part of the service, but moving towards a digital form has occurred within the past 5 years. This "digital hub" is valued by many community members who utilize it to learn about what's going on in the LGBTIQ community, and is considered to be a unique resource across Australia. In saying this, many community members have expressed a desire for a physical hub—a dedicated LGBTIQ community space where they can socialise, access services and learn about community events in a safe environment.

In the past a community space had been facilitated by the AIDS Council of South Australia, however no service has fulfilled this role since ACSA's closure. The combined provision of services by SAMESH and ShineSA in Hyde Street, Adelaide, combined with the FEAST Festival's headquarters directly opposite, is the closest thing to a "hub" that the LGBTIQ community currently has in Adelaide. The combination of health and community services combined with (limited) community space in these buildings is commendable, but we believe more must be done. Additional efforts to develop this hub—in particular to create a "one stop shop" of LGBTIQ services, resources and community spaces—is something regularly identified as beneficial by service providers and community members alike.

Recommendation:

Community consultation should occur to determine what LGBTIQ community members believe would be beneficial, and where they would like to see a hub situated. Although Hyde Street has been mentioned as one possibility, we recognise that LGBTIQ people in outer suburbs may find this inaccessible.

The creation of an LGBTIQ publication in South Australia

Until recently *Blaze Magazine* served as South Australia's only LGBTIQ publication, which built on the presence created by its predecessor, *Gay Times*. With its discontinuation, there are now no such locally created printed resources.

As mentioned above, not everyone is able to access information online. Many people have expressed that they would be delighted to once again see a printed LGBTIQ magazine to help them connect with community and remain aware of what is occurring in Adelaide (and beyond).

Recommendation:

The provision of a grant or other forms of support would allow an LGBTIQ publication to be reformed. This publication would act as an additional way for the LGBTIQ community to engage with one another, and for information to be shared with people who may be unable to access information electronically.

The development of an LGBTIQ peak body/advocacy body in South Australia

There are relatively few LGBTIQ specific services within South Australia. Furthermore, there is no dedicated peak body to address the needs of the wider LGBTIQ community with the exception of the volunteer based South Australian Rainbow Advisory Alliance.

The provision of funding for a peak body would provide a valuable voice for the LGBTIQ community, ensuring that their needs and concerns are able to be recognised and responded to by a dedicated service. This body would be instrumental in supporting the Government with future policy decisions and would be able to act in collaboration with similar bodies interstate to champion best practice models of service delivery across both the government and non-government sectors. It would also complement the existing efforts conducted by DCSI and could provide the basis for an LGBTIQ working group.

Recommendation:

An independent LGBTIQ peak body should be established to ensure the LGBTIQ community has a dedicated voice for advocacy, and to assist Government in the development of LGBTIQ inclusive policies.

LGBTIQ inclusive non-government services

Uniting Communities acknowledges the efforts of the State Government in ensuring Government services are LGBTIQ inclusive, however this must also be a priority for non-government organisations that provide frontline community services.

For many LGBTIQ people, accessing services in times of need can be a challenging prospect. They often choose not to disclose their sexuality, gender identity or relationship status out of fear of discrimination, or opt not to approach service providers believing they may be turned away. Many LGBTIQ people who have been open about their sexuality or gender identity have felt that the response they received from service providers was inappropriate or unhelpful.

In recent years, LGBTIQ inclusion has become a focus for several community service sectors. One such example is the aged care sector, where Uniting Communities is the South Australian provider of LGBTI inclusive practice training on behalf of the National LGBTI Health Alliance. This program emerged as a result of a Federal Government initiative that recognises LGBTIQ people as one of many sub-groups in the aged care sector that may require additional support. This commitment has not been replicated across all community service sectors though, and we believe improved service delivery must be a key focus in the years ahead. The need for LGBTIQ inclusive practice is illustrated in the case of Ruth:

Case study: Ruth³

Ruth is a transgender woman who became homeless due to transphobic abuse from her housemate. With no relatives or friends to support her, Ruth ended up sleeping on the street. She sought help from a homelessness service, however she struggled to access safe housing as there was no shelter available to aid her based on her gender identity. She was perceived as “too masculine” to access a women’s shelter, and men’s shelters were deemed unsafe for her due to the risk of further abuse from other residents. The homelessness service suggested that Ruth try to stay in a boarding house, however she was unable to find a vacancy at a boarding house where she felt safe from transphobic attitudes. Instead, Ruth returned to sleeping on the street while continuing to look for rental accommodation. While sleeping rough she experienced verbal abuse from strangers and was sexually harassed on multiple occasions, but she still perceived this as her safest option.

In response to LGBTIQ individuals unable to access or feeling unsafe at homeless services, the online peer-based community Queer Housing Adelaide was created on Facebook. This has been hugely popular with over 2,000 members at time of writing, however not everyone has a Facebook account nor access to the internet. This network is often not known within the homelessness sector in general and Bfriend has often referred many support workers both within Uniting Communities and outside the organisation to this group. However, community-led initiatives cannot be seen as substitutes for inclusive community services.

³ Not the person’s real name.

Case study: Julian⁴

Julian is a gay man who had been in a long-term relationship with his partner, Kevin. Julian had increasingly experienced controlling behaviour from Kevin, and over time these behaviours escalated to physical violence. Julian tried to leave the relationship several times, however had no friends or family to stay with and the primary form of accommodation offered to him from homelessness services was a shelter where he experienced homophobic abuse. Feeling unsafe there, he always returned to Kevin. The violence continued to escalate, until one night Julian contacted the Homelessness Gateway Service after a particularly serious incident. He received crisis motel accommodation before being referred to a homelessness service for ongoing support. It was explained to him that despite being a victim of domestic violence, he could not be referred to a domestic violence service as they were only able to support women.

At present, not all services are equally accessible to people of all genders and identities, as indicated in the case of Julian above. There are situations where gender binary or gender specific services can leave LGBTIQ people in positions of increased vulnerability or reduced support because they are inherently heteronormative or gender exclusive in their approach to service provision.

Bfriend has heard from several LGBTIQ people who have expressed this concern or have directly experienced discrimination from services on the basis of their sexuality or gender identity. An example of this is the domestic violence sector, which is specifically funded to support women as survivors of domestic violence and men as perpetrators of violence. This perception of domestic violence exclusively as a gendered issue of men's violence against women fails to acknowledge the existence of violence within same gender relationships, or to account for the complexities of violence as it affects transgender, gender diverse or non-binary people.

Even when support isn't explicitly exclusionary in its design, implied heteronormativity can be a particular concern. LGBTIQ people commonly report feeling uncomfortable disclosing their sexuality or gender identity to service providers out of fear of discrimination. This is especially true when the service provider is perceived as being a faith based organisation, as is the case for most large NGOs in South Australia. Bfriend staff are aware of several LGBTIQ people who have avoided seeking support in times of need out of this fear of being discriminated against or turned away due to their sexuality or gender identity.

Through the development of LGBTIQ inclusive services though, improvements in these sectors could occur to increase accessibility. Examples of this already exist through the efforts of some services.

⁴ Not the person's real name.

Case study: Ruby's Reunification Program

Ruby's Reunification Program is a service within the Therapeutic Youth Service team within Uniting Communities. It provides multiple residential properties offering temporary accommodation and assistance to young people and their families during times of family breakdown, with the goal of the young person returning to the family. The Ruby's team recognised that having allocated "male" and "female" rooms in a residential setting was ineffective when supporting gender diverse or non-binary youth. As all youth within the service have private bedrooms, the decision was made to make all rooms gender neutral to more easily support LGBTIQ clients. The addition of various LGBTIQ inclusive materials within the service (for example rainbow flags and signs that indicated the service celebrates diversity) assisted in ensuring that support for LGBTIQ youth was overtly visible in an effort to reduce the risk of homophobic or transphobic attitudes amongst the residents in the homes. Staff have also pursued professional development and periodically consult with Bfriend to ensure that the services they are delivering are inclusive for their LGBTIQ clients. These efforts have been successful, and Ruby's has been able to aid multiple LGBTIQ youth since this recognition occurred.

While the example of Ruby's might be specific to the homelessness sector, inclusive service delivery can be achieved by all community services provided the appropriate knowledge, strategic guidance and resources exist. In the past 6 months, Bfriend has offered free inclusive service training sessions to both Catherine House and St John's Youth Services. These sessions provided the opportunity to further build on their efforts of inclusive service delivery, but also allowed for self-reflection on improvements each service could implement. Both sessions were received with much appreciation and desire to see such training occurring for all services involved in the homelessness and domestic violence sectors. It also allowed these services to recognise the limitations within their own service models, and serves as an example of how broader reforms within the wider homelessness sector could benefit LGBTIQ people and service providers alike.

Recommendation:

All Government funded community services must be inclusive and accessible so that all South Australians, regardless of sexuality or gender identity, can access comparable support in times of need. Greater consultation with LGBTIQ communities must occur so that a deeper understanding of barriers to support exists, especially as they relate to areas of intersectionality (for example LGBTIQ people with disabilities, from CALD communities, etc).

Where necessary, additional funding must be allocated to ensure that service providers are inclusive in the support they are providing or to develop LGBTIQ specific programs to meet the needs of this community. The provision of LGBTIQ inclusive training is a key way to bolster the inclusivity of mainstream services, and we recommend that it be developed for community service providers and installed as a component in relevant tertiary qualifications.

Collection of data relating to gender and sexual diversity by community service providers

At present, most community service providers don't gather data about clients' sexuality or gender identity. While this is understandable (as this information is often irrelevant in regards to the provision of services), the confidential and sensitive collection of this data can help to provide invaluable insight into how frequently LGBTIQ people may be seeking support, as well as any other trends relating to their needs. Without this data, it is difficult to ascertain the needs of LGBTIQ people or to address gaps in service provision.

It is important to note that many LGBTIQ people will feel uncomfortable in openly disclosing their sexuality or gender identity to service providers when they feel they may experience discrimination or a reduced level of support. The data that is collected will inevitably fail to fully represent the number of LGBTIQ people seeking support, however we still perceive this as an improvement over the limited data that is currently available.

Recommendation:

Develop systems to enable service providers to gather statistical data about gender and sexual diversity. Utilise this data to help address the needs of the LGBTIQ community.

An LGBTIQ inclusion strategy for all community service providers

The *2014-2016 South Australian Strategy for the Inclusion of LGBTIQ People* has provided direction for State Government services to become more inclusive in their service delivery, and *The Way Forward* outlines several achievements that have already occurred. These current approaches focus on the Government sector though, and do little to address the need for inclusive practices within the broader non-government community service sector.

The creation of a subsequent strategy should be a key focus for the Government, however this strategy must expand to ensure that all non-government community service providers also strive to be more inclusive in their service delivery. Such a strategy should be developed in consultation with LGBTIQ community members, LGBTIQ services, and relevant community service providers to ensure LGBTIQ voices are heard and practical solutions to address any concerns are implemented.

Recommendation:

We view the creation of a subsequent strategy as a key priority for the Government and strongly encourage further community consultation to create this strategy.

Increased visibility of Gay and Lesbian Liaison Officers (GLLOs) within SAPOL

Efforts by the Government to revitalize the GLLO program over recent years are commendable, but Bfriend doesn't believe this goal has been fully achieved yet. Until recently there was no mention on the SAPOL website of these officers, and how to access them. Many LGBTIQ folk are unaware GLLOs exist within SAPOL to speak with but those that are aware, have shared experiences of having to recount their experience multiple times to

officers or simply receiving negative attitudes from the officer they first encounter. Many LGBTIQ folk still do not access police support or are considerably hesitant to do so, in a similar way to how they are often reluctant to contact community service providers due to fear of discrimination.

Despite a positive police presence at community events such as the Pride March and Picnic in the Park during the FEAST Festival, many LGBTIQ people still express a sense of fear and mistrust towards these efforts by the police.

Recommendation:

Increased police engagement and extensive community consultation with the LGBTIQ community is still required in order to ensure that community members feel safe to approach SAPOL in times of need.

Continued legislative reforms

Substantial legislation reforms have occurred with bipartisan support by the South Australian Government and opposition over the last 18 months, for which congratulations must be given. Significant developments have taken place in this period that move South Australia closer towards social and legal equality for the LGBTIQ community however further work is needed.

Two such examples of this are the need to eliminate the “Gay Panic” legal defence and to expunge the criminal records of those convicted of sexuality related offences prior to homosexuality’s decriminalization in the 1970s. These issues continue to act as legislative forms of discrimination against the LGBTIQ community that, if corrected, would serve as a symbolic example of a continued commitment to reform. With marriage equality being achieved and the Sydney Mardi Gras celebrating its 40th anniversary this year, 2018 is a perfect year to implement the move to expunge these criminal records.

Recommendation:

Consultation with the LGBTIQ community, the Equal Opportunity Commission and the Human Rights Law Centre will provide an opportunity to address any additional areas for legislative reform.

Easier access to grants for LGBTIQ community groups

Most LGBTIQ community groups are volunteer based, and many operate independently of non-government organisations. As a result, they lack awareness of grants (such as those available via DCSI) and may be ineligible for grant funding. Despite this, these groups provide invaluable support for the LGBTIQ community in South Australia—support that could be better aided through the distribution of small grants.

Recommendation:

The expansion of existing grant schemes to be more accessible to community groups, or the development of a model that would enable NGOs to apply for grants on behalf of these groups, would enable the LGBTIQ community itself to take leadership of its own development and to address some of its needs through small, short-term projects and initiatives.

Question 2: What would you like to tell specific Government agencies?

Uniting Communities encourages all key Government agencies to continue to strive for LGBTIQ inclusion in the services they provide and in their policies. In particular, we believe that the Department for Communities and Social Inclusion, Department for Education and Child Development, Department for Child Protection, Department of Health, Attorney General's Department and the Department of Premier and Cabinet have key roles to play in ensuring that LGBTIQ inclusion continues to be a priority in regards to their respective portfolios.

Providing an inclusive service or department for the LGBTIQ community is more than simply offering awareness training and displaying a rainbow on documentation. Being inclusive of LGBTIQ individuals involves much wider understanding and acknowledgement of both past and current inequalities experienced by this community. Despite marriage equality having now been achieved in Australia, much inequity remains for LGBTIQ people.

An active and public demonstration of efforts made to ensure employees and the workplace is supportive and welcoming of LGBTIQ consumers is a multi-faceted and ongoing process. Staff and volunteer awareness training is certainly important, especially for those interacting directly with members of the public, but this must be supported by change in workplace policies and managerial commitment to implementing these changes. Even simple actions such as removing gendered categories and titles from paper work, inclusive language used by those working in frontline customer service positions, having LGBTIQ materials on display in the workplace and having procedures that allow LGBTIQ consumers and employees to discuss difficult situations safely can have major impacts for LGBTIQ people.

Integrating an expectation of LGBTIQ inclusivity can occur as a compulsory unit for employee induction processes. A government wide professional pride network (for LGBTIQ employees and allies) can foster a greater sense of inclusion, and developing comprehensive LGBTIQ specific resources for all state government agencies can actively demonstrate a serious commitment to inclusive practice.

Collecting client data is important to demonstrate demand for, and access to, services but it must be conducted in a respectful manner. Identifying as an LGBTIQ person to a service or organisation is not always necessary and can be a stressful experience for many.

Implementing LGBTIQ inclusion must never be a token gesture, a once-off event, nor conducted to simply 'tick a box' because policy or reporting requires it to happen. Genuine

and respectful efforts will be noticed, as will those that are not. Consulting with those from the LGBTIQ community, especially those who have interacted with a specific service or organisation, can be useful in providing important feedback on customer service or procedural matters. However this in itself can be problematic, as with any community consultation, and must avoid being tokenistic or not following through.

Question 3: What are we doing well?

Despite the areas identified for continued development in this submission, we acknowledge that considerable improvements have already taken place.

Continued funding of LGBTIQ specific services and initiatives

The continued funding of programs such as Bfriend, Trans Wellbeing, the Safe Schools Anti-Bullying Initiative (SSAI) and, in recent months, the Marriage Equality Counselling Service, are laudable examples of support being provided to ensure the social and emotional health and wellbeing of LGBTIQ community members.

The SSAI is such an important professional development program for school teachers and staff in ensuring LGBTIQ students can attend school in a safe environment. When other states have distanced themselves from its predecessor, the Safe Schools Coalition, the South Australian Government has publicly stated its confidence in this program with ongoing financial support and redevelopment, which we fully support.

Support for LGBTIQ community events, such as the FEAST Festival and the Adelaide Pride March, further demonstrates that LGBTIQ people are respected and valued by the Government. The significance of these actions cannot be understated in helping LGBTIQ people to feel that they are wanted by South Australian society. Feast remains an important part of the South Australian LGBTIQ calendar and is the main event for this community to gather and celebrate its uniqueness. Having a space to showcase talent and explore a vast array of topics relating to the LGBTIQ community remains essential and provides a space for those new to the community to connect with it.

Implementation of an LGBTIQ inclusive public sector and broader workforce

The State Government's current dedication to fair and inclusive workplaces is admirable. More broadly, it's necessary to ensure that LGBTIQ employees and volunteers are protected and supported in all workplaces across the state, both within the government sector and beyond. The efforts of Dr Niki Vincent and her team within the Equal Opportunities Commission are evidence that the Government is serious about this objective, and we look forward to the continued work of the EOC in the pursuit of this goal.

Legislative reform

State Government action on issues such as marriage equality and the legislative reforms undertaken in 2017 were much needed and long overdue, especially those pertaining to the

health of transgender and gender diverse individuals. Changes in gender recognition, fertility treatment, relationships, and implementing inclusive language in 140 pieces of legislation to remove the discrimination they historically incurred based on gender identity, sexuality or intersex status. In addition, the Parliamentary apology to the LGBTIQ community was a momentous and emotional occasion for not just those present at the apology, but for many unable to attend.

Community consultation and engagement

Colleen Ross' efforts to engage with the LGBTIQ community here in Adelaide have gone above and beyond, providing a presence at LGBTIQ events and hosting forums on specific issues. Colleen has connected well with key LGBTIQ services and workers who support this community in South Australia, to continually seek feedback and input into her work within DCSI. Her efforts, passion, and presence at meetings and committees is greatly appreciated and welcomed.

Hosting IDAHOT breakfasts each year with speakers

This event has been great for professional networking, celebrating the day, sharing what has been achieved during the past 12 months, and hearing from key LGBTIQ individuals. There are opportunities to further develop this, though.

Changing the event to an evening event would improve accessibility for many community members. Such an event could also include elements of recognition for LGBTIQ efforts in the past 12 months, including those in community, government and private sectors. As an example, in 2017 the Governor of Victoria welcomed over 900 guests from diverse LGBTIQ and ally communities to Government House to mark IDAHOT. This event was the first time that Government House opened its doors to honour our diverse LGBTIQ communities on such a large scale. Guests of all ages, backgrounds and identities travelled from across Victoria to attend the reception. A similar initiative in South Australia could serve as an even greater celebration of the LGBTIQ community on IDAHOT.