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I got to a point where it was either come out or drop out. This group has meant I can show up at school".

Child and Youth Wellbeing Framework Submission

April 2021

WIO
working it out

Tasmania's gender, sexuality and intersex
status support and education service

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WIO's engagement with young people and their families

Working It Out (WIO) is Tasmania's only dedicated support, advocacy and education service for Tasmania's lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTIQ+) population. Our mission is to create a more just society for LGBTIQ+ individuals and their families.

WIO started with a grant from the Youth Foundation of Australia to address the high rates of suicide amongst LGNTIQ+ youth, particularly on the north west coast. It has been supporting young LGBTIQ+ Tasmanians for over 22 years, providing services state-wide, via 1:1 support, peer group sessions, education and professional learning in schools and other activities.

We have engaged with the Department of Education (DoE) for many years as part of the DoE LGBTIQ+ Reference Group. Over the years, several programs and initiatives to support young people in schools were delivered. Between 2015-2017 WIO was funded under the Federal Safe Schools program, a program developed to address the significant issues being experienced by young people in school, as highlighted in the 2010 Writing Themselves In 3 report (Hillier, 2010). Following defunding of this project the DoE continued to fund WIO via the Anti-bullying initiative and Community Partnership funding.

Our staff engage regularly with young people in and outside of schools. Below is our response the six elements of the Government's Children and Young People. They are based largely on the outcomes of a large, recent national survey of LGBTIQ+ young people (Writing Themselves in 4 – WTI4) as there is no specific Tasmanian data available. We have also included direct responses from young people we work with, although our capacity to consult is limited. Their responses speak to many of the issues highlighted in the national research.

Negative societal view on people of diverse sexuality, gender and bodies continues to have a profound impact on young Tasmanians. The final section of this submission lists key recommendations emanating from both research, consultation and evidence based practice.

Domain 1

Being loved and safe

Being loved and safe means that children and young people:

 have a safe, stable and supportive home environment

 feel safe, secure and protected at home and in the community

 feel valued and respected

 have positive, trusted relationships with other people

 have a voice and the ability to raise concerns and have these concerns addressed

Writing Themselves in 4 (2021)

Verbal and physical abuse and harassment remain a significant issue for LGBTIQ+ young people.

WTI4 found that in the past 12 months, two-fifths (40.8%; n = 2,524) of participants had experienced verbal harassment, almost one-quarter (22.8%; n = 1,273) sexual harassment or assault, and almost one-tenth (9.7%; n = 529) physical harassment or assault based on their sexuality or gender identity.

Schools remained the major site of abuse and harassment (61%).

Family acceptance has improved however, it can still be a site of abuse, with 11% of young people experiencing abuse in the home in the past 12 month, predominantly from parents.

Domain 2

Having material basics

Having material basics means that children and young people:

- have access to adequate, stable housing
- have access to adequate clothing and footwear
- have access to nutritious food and clean water
- have access to materials to support participation in activities
- have access to education and training materials
- have access to adequate heating and cooling

Writing Themselves in 4 (2021)

LGBTIQ+ young people experience high levels of homelessness and housing distress.

Almost one-quarter (23.6%; n = 1,501) of WTI4 participants had experienced one or more forms of homelessness in their lifetime, including 11.5% (n = 733) who experienced this in the past 12 months.

Table 47 Proportion of participants who had experienced homelessness in their lifetime and in the past 12 months

Homelessness (n = 6,363)	Ever		Past 12 months	
	n	%	n	%
Run away from home or the place you live	1,105	17.4	446	7.0
Left home or the place you live because you were asked/made to leave	667	10.5	296	4.7
Couch surfed because you had no other place to stay	423	6.7	223	3.5
Been homeless	260	4.1	105	1.7
One or more experience of homelessness	1,501	23.6	733	11.5

Of the 1,464 participants who reported specific causes of the experiences of homelessness, over three-fifths (62.4%; n = 913) cited mental health issues as the cause of their homelessness, over two-fifths cited rejection from family (44.7%; n = 654) or family violence (43.3%; n = 634), and one-fifth (19.6%; n = 287) cited financial stress as the cause of their homelessness.

Domain 3

Being healthy

Being healthy means that children and young people:

- are mentally and physically healthy
- are emotionally well, happy and supported
- are as physically active as they can be
- have access to appropriate health and care services
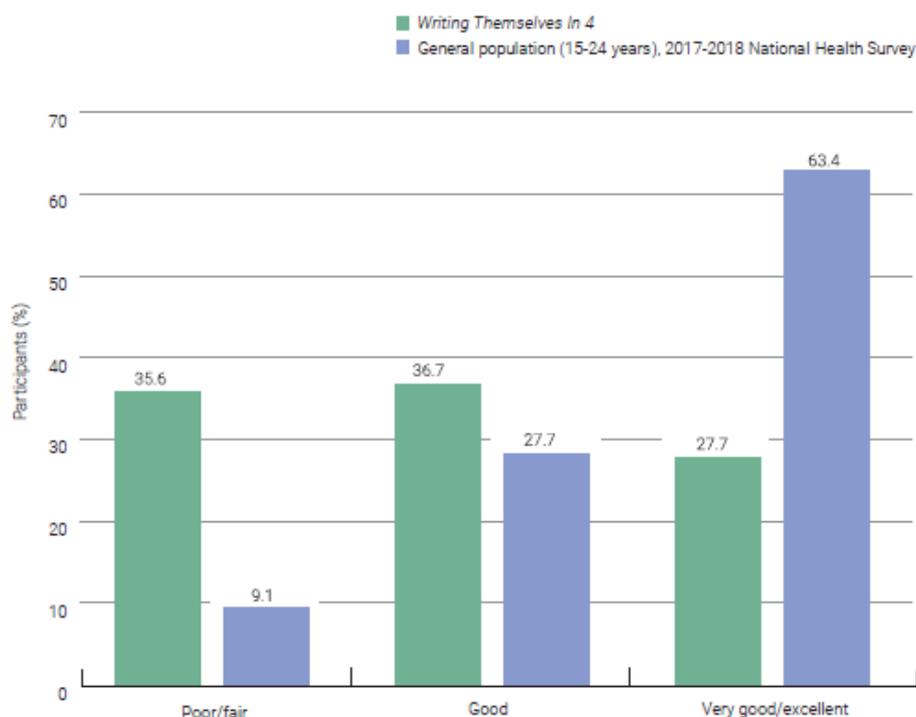- are immunised

Writing Themselves in 4 (2021)

The self-reported health and wellbeing outcomes for LGBTIQ+ are significantly pooper than the general population.

Figure 28 Self-rated health of *Writing Themselves In 4* participants aged 15-21 years compared to general population aged 15-24 years, National Health Survey (2017-2018)

Legend:
- Writing Themselves In 4
- General population (15-24 years), 2017-2018 National Health Survey

| Category	Writing Themselves In 4	General population
Poor/fair	35.6	9.1
Good	36.7	27.7
Very good/excellent	27.7	63.4

Y-axis: Participants (%)

Levels of psychological distress are particularly alarming:

- Almost three-fifths (58.2%; n = 3,712) of participants had seriously considered attempting suicide in the previous 12 months
- Almost one-quarter (24.4%; n = 1,536) had made a suicide plan in the previous 12 months.
- One-tenth (10.1%; n = 632) had attempted suicide in the past 12 months while over one-quarter (25.6%; n = 1,605) had attempted suicide at some point in their lifetime.
- Almost two-thirds of participants (62.1%; n = 3,903) reported having ever self-harmed, and four in ten (40.1%; n = 2,521) in the past 12 months.

Scores on the Psychological Distress Scale (K10) are significantly higher than their peers.

Figure 33 K10 scores of *Writing Themselves In 4* participants aged 16-17 years compared to among the general population aged 16-17 years
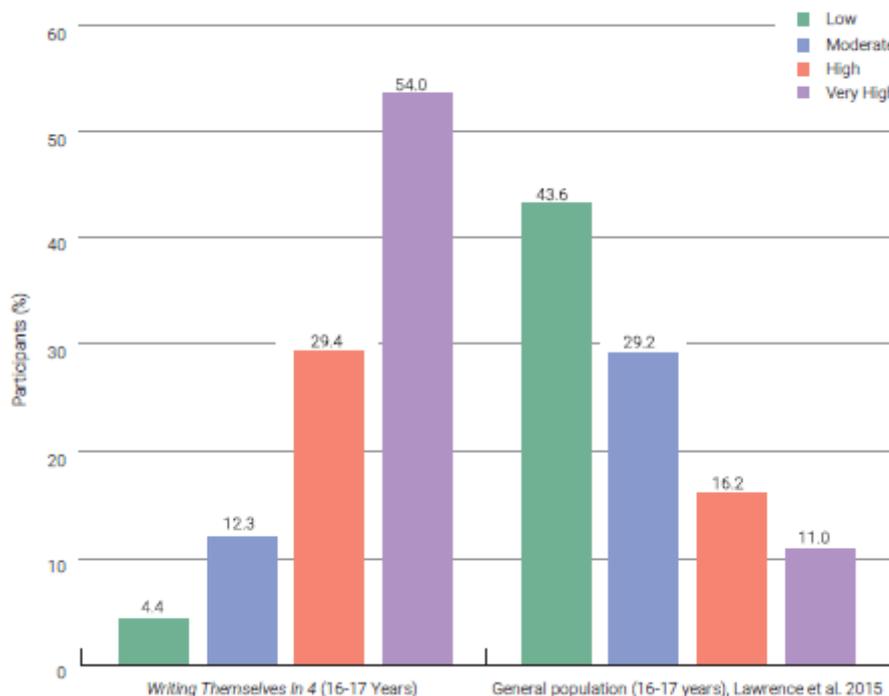
LGBTIQ+ young people are 3-5 times more likely to attempt suicide.

Rates on all measures are higher for trans and gender diverse young people, LGBTIQ+ young people with disabilities and those from a multicultural background.

85.3% of trans women, 81% of trans men and 79.3% of non-binary participants (79.3%; n = 960) had experienced any suicidal ideation, planning or attempts, or self-harm ideation or attempts in the past 12 months,

39.8% of participants with disability reported attempting suicide in their lifetime, more than double the rate of those without disability.

79.1% of participants from a multicultural background reported ever experiencing suicidal ideation in their lifetime.

Domain 4

Learning means children and young people:

- are attending and engaging in education, training or employment
- are participating in early childhood education
- are developing literacy and numeracy skills appropriate to age
- are supported to learn by their caregiver and education providers
- receive assistance for additional needs

Writing Themselves in 4 (2021)

More than three-fifths (60.2%) of participants in WTI4 said that in the past 12 months they felt unsafe or uncomfortable at secondary school due to their sexuality or gender identity.

Over three-quarters of participants reported sometimes or frequently hearing negative remarks regarding sexuality in their educational setting in the past 12 months, while over three-fifths sometimes or frequently heard negative remarks relating to gender identity or gender expression.

Over a third of participants at secondary school reported missing day/s at their educational setting in the past 12 months because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable. This experience of missing days of education was more commonly reported by trans and gender diverse participants, compared to cisgender men and women.

Domain 5

Participating

Participating means children and young people:

are engaging with peers and community groups

are an active participant in their own life; including being able to have a say and have their opinion heard and valued

are taking part in organised activities, including sport

have access to and use technology and social media

Writing Themselves in 4 (2021)

"[Written responses from young LGBTQA+ people indicated that] affirmation was also important to young people in the sense of being recognised for who they are with respect to gender or sexuality, including from connection with LGBTQA+ community.

These responses show that supporting young LGBTQA+ people it's not just about the provision of mental health services, all those these are crucially important in response to the high levels of poor mental health and suicidality is shown in this report, but to ensure programmes are in place that support and affirm LGBTQA+ young people in their everyday lives.
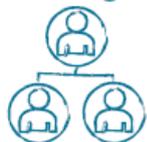
This might include school-based programmes that affirm LGBTQA+ people such as gay straight alliances [Pride/Diversity Groups] or other forms of peer-based programmes that help to build connections and friendships between LGBTQA+ young people.

Families and parents also clearly play an important part in ensuring young LGBTQA+ people feel good and confident about themselves. Information and support for families of LGBTQA+ young people may also play an important role in supporting young people in their everyday lives."

Domain 6

Having a positive sense of culture and identity

Having a positive sense of culture and identity means children and young people:

- can find out about family and personal history and are supported to connect positively with their culture

- feel like they belong

- have a positive sense of self-identity and self-esteem

- are in touch with cultural or spiritual practices and have these practices valued and respected

Writing Themselves in 4 (2021)

As indicated in Domain 5, connecting with the LGBTIQ+ community is an important part of developing a positive sense of self.

In particular, school-based programmes that affirm LGBTQA+ people such as gay straight alliances [Pride/Diversity Groups] or other forms of peer-based programmes that help to build connections and friendships between LGBTQA+ young people are important.

In the words on young LGBTIQ+ Tasmanians:

LGBTIQ+ young people health and wellbeing consultation

Below are the outcomes of consultations conducted by Working It Out in conjunction with school staff/parents, with LGBTIQ+ students across three schools March – April 2021, one high school, one college, and one primary school. Locations include the north, north west, and south.

All the schools who participated are schools which have received LGBTIQ+ Inclusive practice professional learning, and two have an existing Pride/Diversity group.

Overall, 65 students participated in the consultations. Each consultation session lasted approximately one hour.

The questions students were asked to reflect on were:

1. What are the top five most important health, safety, and wellbeing issues for you as an LGBTIQ+ young person?
2. What more could be done to increase your sense of safety, wellbeing and belonging at school, in your family, and in the wider community?

Note: we discussed what health, safety and wellbeing meant physically, socially, emotionally, from a friendship, family, school based and community perspective.

The most common responses have been summarized below with an indication of the percentage of students who shared similar sentiments or experiences where relevant. In some cases where a concern was salient, that has also been recorded even if it was not shared my other students.

At school

Roughly 78% of students reported that they felt unsafe at school.

100% of students spoke about the lack of positive LGBTIQ+ images, representation, and narratives at school.

Issues:

- We still hear negative slurs like faggot, tranny, lezzo, that's gay, don't be so gay, God hates you, you're sick in the f***ing head', 'You are an abomination'.
- There are no consequences, teachers let things go, leaving us feeling unsafe.
- We witness transphobic and homophobic bullying that's not picked up on.
- People (teachers) say there is no tolerance, but they let it go sending out a message that it is ok. And, for us as students leaving us knowing that no one will do anything.
- There are teachers we can talk to, but we don't feel confident that they wouldn't share our questions, or identities with others (without our consent).
- Teachers use of LGBTIQ+ language has increased since training but only marginally. They still seem to find it awkward and uncomfortable and gloss over thing.
- Histories are not taught. We know nothing about our history, so then how can straight and cisgendered students understand anything when we don't?
- We are being taught things by people who don't really know, who don't have the confidence to teach.

- We really need people with lived experiences to come in as guest speakers and talk about histories, to talk about what it's like to be LGBTIQ+ in Tasmania, or to be raised by an LGBTIQ+ family.
- I never see affirmative materials in my school that welcome LGBTIQ+ students or families, there is a lack of positive representation.
- If safe sex is taught it rarely focuses on LGBTIQ+ students. Leaving us thinking there is something not ok about our desires, it also means we are more at risk of sexually transmitted diseases, of unwanted pregnancies etc; like we don't have rights and that makes us feel dysphoric like we can't connect to our bodies.
- People ask us questions no matter what our age and we have to educate them – how come?
- Change rooms are a real problem. Toilets too but change rooms more so particularly when things are held off campus and you don't know the safe places to get changed. Why don't all toilets have sanitary units?
- School events, sports events - listening to people talk about unfair advantage.
- Cyber bullying and social media are a source of bullying.
- School buses are a source of bullying (arrive to and from school feeling anxious – particularly a problem for students who are going home to unsafe houses).
- Teachers who make fun of us, don't listen, misgender.
- Our privacy doesn't matter at school.

Suggestions:

- Keep doing what you're doing [to Working It Out]
- Make sure there are real consequences for negative behaviours even if seemingly small (put out fires), this is the same for attitudes, language as well. Treat it like racism, or sexism.
- More education, more openness - less fear.
- Address the myths, have people come in to talk to share real lived experiences - to address impacts of homophobia and transphobia.
- Stop teaching people there are only two genders. It is damaging and keeps people thinking we are making it up, attention seeking and then we must defend ourselves.
- Don't refer to LGBTIQ+ young people in class in ways that set them up: "Would you date a trans person?".
- Education about language and the acronym. Also use of 'that's gay'. Someone kicked a soccer ball it was a bad shot and people said, 'Oh, that was such a gay shot.', and everyone laughed.
- Don't hire teachers who are transphobic and homophobic.
- We need more events at school. More information, flyers with more information.
- We need more positive stories / teachings that support us.
- Schools need to challenge religious hatred by speaking back to some of the misinformation about the bible, or even teach religion in ways that include us. God doesn't hate us.

At home:

Issues

- Being out at home is unsafe (66%).
- Nowhere to go to get away from family / feeling unsafe, always on edge – waiting to be attacked and no money to go somewhere – nowhere to go.

- Access to online sites policed.
- Lots of, 'you're too young, being influenced, don't know enough (age thing)', people (LGBTIQ+ people) are just wanting to influence you – prey on your innocence etc;
- Parents who have different opinions. Not safe around one parent but safe around another.
- Feelings of being inauthentic around one parent to please them, then feel anxious and depressed, no one to talk to, nowhere to go – people don't get it. They make you feel like you're the one with the problem. That you're lying, attention seeking.
- Not safe to talk with others. Don't trust people will get it, family, siblings, anyone – lonely.
- Spend a lot of time in one's room, on social media, it's easier we don't have to deal with anyone asking questions.
- The only shows on tv (mainstream) reinforce stereotypes or when they are about LGBTIQ+ people or documentaries they are not about kids like us.
- We often hear - listen to really homophobic/transphobic things at home and then get up and go to school the next day with no one to talk to.
- Clothing, hair, make up, name it - we can't buy it because we are being ridiculed.
- Puberty blockers – told we must wait till we are 18. My body is changing, and I don't want to go to school – What? Will I wait till I am 18 to go back to school?
- No talk at home about safe sex, or still discussions re opposite gender relationships. Nowhere to go for this info.
- Not being allowed to see my friends because they are a bad influence.
- Not safe house, no place to hang out with others who get it. We don't always want to talk to a psych.
- Friends can't come over, my parents are judgy, misgender etc;
- Fear of being assaulted, by parents, siblings - verbally, physically (at times).
- Tell parents and they are like, 'Yep but if yor're really a girl, boy etc; then how come you still want too….'
- Our privacy doesn't matter. People speak for us know us better than we know ourselves.

Suggestions

(Note, it was hard to draw out suggestions here as students feel very powerless in relation to what they can do or have control of in this arena of their life).

- Parents needs more education.
- More positive stories on TV. Not so much about sickness, wrongness.
- Do something at school, invite parent's promotion – awards.
- Having parents attend session with adult LGBTIQ+ people who are ok – to show them they are not sick.
- More help to talk with parents/carers etc; don't leave it up to student. Someone needs to support us who knows and gets it.

In your local community / the world:

Issues:

- Don't know what community organisations exists. Lists aren't good enough - we need to know what they offer, what we can expect when we walk in, what are their attitudes, will

we be safe, will they hear us, will they treat us like we know what we are talking about. Can we just be ourselves and not be on guard all the time.

- No access to safe medical pathways or information re safe sex or transitioning. Why must we always have our parents involved, sometimes we just want to ask questions first. Such a lack of privacy, like we don't have any rights.
- Confusion about medical pathways here. Scared to ask for help. Don't know where to go. Afraid of being labelled, being told we are sick.
- Public toilets are a real problem. Feeling unsafe to use toilets in public - fear of what people will say or do. People are always saying people will prey on us.

Suggestions:

- Dedicated groups for gender diverse young people to listen to people talk about their experiences and then be able to ask questions.
- Want to meet people who have gone through transition, maybe have them come with me to appointments.
- Want someone to come with us to GP or other appointments like a mentor – yep we want mentors (*big sister big brother).
- More positive representation in the media, advertising (billboards etc), we need more in the mainstream. We also need more on social media.
- More LGBTIQ+ run services. Not just counselling but drop in spaces on weekends. We want a place we can hang out, talk, watch videos, drink coffee.
- More events, more opportunities.
- We want to do things outside of school.
- Activism, local, and international.

Recommendations:

The key recommendations from Private Lives 3 and Writing Themselves 4 is to address systemic issues underlying abuse, harassment, stigmatisation and exclusion, and to do that primarily via peer-led community service organisation such as WIO.

Based on research and practice-based evidence, WIO can make a significant impact on improving outcomes for LGBTIQ+ via the following programs and supports.

## 1. Ensuring homes and schools are safe: WIO's Valuing Diversity Framework

> *Experiences of poor mental health need to be understood within a context of prevailing homophobia, biphobia and transphobia that is embedded in many parts of society and is illustrated by LGBTQA+ young people's experiences of verbal, physical, and sexual harassment or assault [of which schools are the primary site]. It is not sufficient or appropriate to expect LGBTQA+ young people to become more resilient to such experiences, or to simply offer opportunities to cope better in the face of such hostility. Rather, it is crucial that efforts are made to prevent abuse, harassment or assault being directed towards LGBTQA+ communities in the first place. (Hill et al., 2021)*

Research overwhelmingly shows that poor mental health outcomes can be significantly reduced when young people are supported both by their community (i.e. school) and their parents (Olson, Durwood, McLaughlin, 2016; Veale, Peter, Travers, & Saewyc, 2017). When young people are supported and safe in these two environments, they can live as healthy and productive children/teenagers and they have high levels of protective factors which impact positively on mental health outcomes. (Veale et al., 2017)

LGBTIQ+ young people themselves have made it very clear that supportive families and inclusive schools are key to their success and well-being (Human Rights campaign, 2018). This is one area of mental health and wellbeing where we know clearly what can be done to improve outcomes.

The Valuing Diversity Framework (VDF) has been designed in Tasmania, for Tasmanians. It takes a long-term approach to addressing issues of bullying, harassment and discrimination in schools. We work with individual schools to embed positive narratives, representations and practices in all levels of the school and community.

Practically, we support schools by providing information and resources, tailored professional learning, policy support, assisting with the establishment of student diversity groups, delivering community education; and supporting individual students, families and school staff.
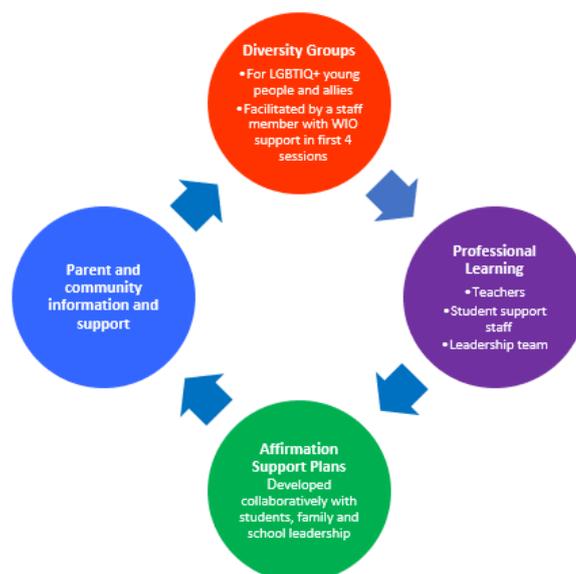
The difference we make:

"Working It Out has been an absolute lifesaver for my family as our transgender 12-year-old child began on his journey…. I really had no idea what to do, who to speak to and how I could support my son and make sure he had everything that he needed.

…. Once we had our first meeting with XR at WIO, it felt like a big relief… We had regular meetings with XR before and after our school meeting and to be able to have XR develop the Affirmation Plan for us and to know that it covered things that I would probably not have thought about was such a relief and gave us some hope for the future.

…. The biggest measure of all the support and assistance we had and continue to have from WIO is my son. He is happy and settled at school and able to be his true self, which I honestly believe would not have happened without the amazing staff at WIO. I have my child back after a rocky and rough 2 years."

Parent, December 2019

"If there had been a diversity group at my previous school, I wouldn't have internalised my hatred for myself. I am in year 12 and in second term and I have just come out because I just hated who I was. This group changed things. I got to a point where it was either come out or drop out. This group has meant I can show up at school".

Student, Hellyer College, July 2019

I just wanted to express my gratitude on having XR working in the Department and being able to support schools, staff and students. Whoever decided to make this position available (and selected XR for this role) deserves a thorough pat on the back.

Xris has provided amazing support for our young person, who is in a home situation that includes homophobia and transphobia. A very risky situation. Xris has provided great support to me, the Senior Staff team and conducted PL for teachers. I feel very confident that we are getting this right. As this was my first time working through this with a young person, supporting school staff to understand the requirements and having the correct procedures in place……I am sure that I would not have gone anywhere near as well without XR's guidance and advice. I probably would have made some errors along the way!

Principal, 2021

Demand for Working It Out's support for schools and young people constantly outstrips our ability to meet it. When we do respond, we are often forced to apply band-aid solutions instead of creating lasting change which is both inefficient and ineffective.

We seek sufficient funding to meet current needs and to partner with the Department of Education to build capacity within schools and the Department to underpin long-term change.

2. Peer mentoring scheme for LGBTIQ+ young people

Young people are clearly seeking role models who can tell them that they will be ok, and to help them navigate environments which are unknown and scary.

A peer volunteering mentoring or 'buddy' scheme matching younger LGBTIQ+ people and their families with vetted, trained and supported older peer mentors, would support young people and their families in a way that was both timely and targeted.

Mentors could also undertake public speaking roles, relaying both their experiences and educating others about LGBTIQ+ services and histories in Tasmania.

3. Accessible and appropriate mental health services

Ensuring young people can live in secure and safe environments is a strong protective factor against negative mental health outcomes.

However, where there is need for mental health support, this must be provided by informed and skilled practitioners who understand the complexities of gender and sexuality.

Two strategies are crucial for this:

1. Establishing a community-based LGBTIQ+ mental health service for LGBTIQ+ young people.
2. Ensure mental health practitioners regularly receive professional development in providing inclusive and knowledgeable support for LGBTIQ+ young people.

4. Tackling stigma and violence

Efforts are needed to tackle stigma directed towards LGBTIQ+ communities and violence enacted against them.

This could include (but not be limited to) community messaging campaigns, programs aimed at embedding positive representation of LGBTIQ+ people in media, efforts to ensure LGBTIQ+ inclusion in government policy frameworks and prioritisation in funding areas, such as community-inclusion grants.

 It could also include efforts to address gender stereotypes and norms that challenge the ability of trans and gender diverse young people to live openly and safely within their communities.

5. Addressing homelessness.

Resourcing LGBTIQ+ community-controlled organisations, or other accredited and culturally safe organisations, to design and deliver homelessness interventions that can connect the range of relevant services to meet the needs of this population.

6. Access to trans-affirming care

Service provision should be local and accessible to minimise stress and harm.

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