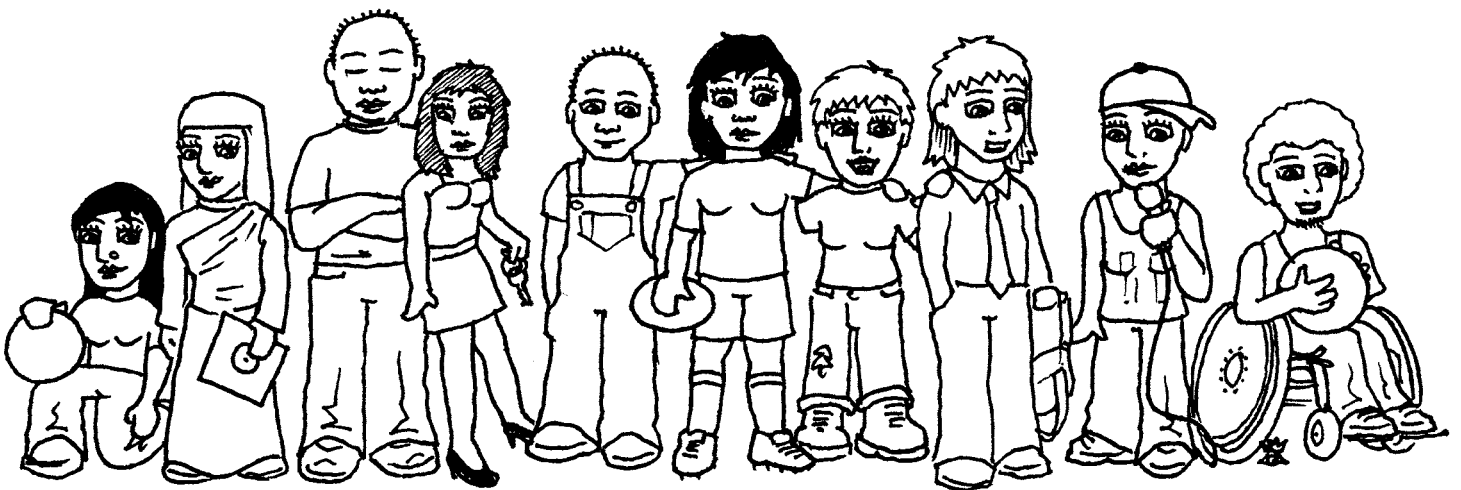


# Opening the doors

*A 'Do It Yourself' Access and Equity manual  
for working with young people*



*Produced by YAPA and the Access Project Reference Group  
for the Nepean Better Futures Strategy*

## Opening the Doors

This is one chapter of **Opening the Doors**. The other chapters are:

- What is Access and Equity?
- What does the law require me to do about Access & Equity?
- What does my funding body require me to do about Access & Equity?
- Young people with a disability
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people
- Gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgender young people
- Early school leavers
- Rural and geographically isolated young people
- Young women
- Young parents
- Refugee and migrant young people
- Young people with mental health issues
- Young people involved with the juvenile justice system

**Opening the Doors** is only available online. You can:

- browse the publication in a series of web pages
- download individual chapters as PDF files
- download the whole publication as a PDF (large file: 2.4 MB – broadband recommended).

[www.yapa.org.au/openingdoors](http://www.yapa.org.au/openingdoors)

**Enquiries:** info@yapa.org.au (02) 9319 1100 or 1800 627 323

**Produced** by YAPA & the Nepean Access Project Reference Group for the Nepean Better Futures Strategy.

**Drawings:** Colin Stokes.

**Design:** Breakout Design & Print [www.breakout.net.au](http://www.breakout.net.au) 02 9660 9111

**Copyright** 2006 NSW Department of Community Services.

**Disclaimer:** This manual is a general guide for NSW services designed specifically for the Nepean Region (Blue Mountains Penrith & Hawkesbury). The producers of the manual took reasonable care to ensure that all information was correct as of 2005. However government regulations, laws and standards are complex and do change over time. This document is not intended as legal advice. You should seek clarification on legal matters through other publications and authorities.

# How to use the checklists

---

**We have developed some checklists to get you thinking about how your service is performing on access and equity issues.**

It is best if you can work through these activities with your management committee or staff team, but you can also do these activities by yourself.

## **Steps**

1. Read through each checklist and answer yes or no to each question
2. You now have some guidelines for what you are doing well (your yes responses) and some goals for how you can improve (your no responses)
3. Prioritise each of your no responses
4. Choose 3 – 5 goals to work on in the next month and write a plan of how and when you will achieve them. You may want to include your plans in your work plan or strategic plan.
5. Once you have achieved one of your goals you can record your action as a new achievement and choose another goal from the remaining items on your list.
6. Keep other people, including your management committee, informed of your progress and share good ideas and examples with your colleagues and your youth network.

# WORKING WITH ... **GAY, LESBIAN, BI-SEXUAL & TRANSGENDER YOUNG PEOPLE**

---



## **DEFINITION**

Here are some definitions which may be useful:

**Bi-sexual** = being sexually attracted to both sexes

**Gay** = a male homosexual person. Sometimes this term is used to describe both lesbians and gay men.

**Heterosexual** = being sexually attracted to people of the opposite sex

**Homosexual** = being sexually attracted to people of the same sex

**Intersex** = a person who is born with both male and female hormones and genitalia. Intersex persons were formally referred to as *hermaphrodites*.

**Lesbian** = a female homosexual person

**Transgender** = a person who is biologically one gender, but strongly identifies as the

opposite gender. A transgender person will often adopt the clothing and identity of their preferred gender.

To make this manual easier to read we have used the terms *gay and lesbian* to refer to young people who are gay, lesbian, bi-sexual or transgender.

## **DEMOGRAPHICS**

It is generally believed that 1 in 10 people are gay or lesbian.<sup>8</sup>

An Australian survey found that 8-10% of young people identified as not exclusively heterosexual.<sup>13</sup>

This means that in an average high school of 1000 students, around 100 young people may be gay or lesbian.

Some of the young people who use your service will be gay or lesbian. You may or may not know which young people because they



may not have “come out” or told you about it. You cannot tell if someone is gay or lesbian by the way they look or sound.

## TERMINOLOGY

There are a range of terms used to refer to people who are not heterosexual such as *people of diverse sexualities* or *GLBTI* (gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, transgender and intersex) or *same sex attracted* for gay men and lesbians.

The terms *gay*, *lesbian*, *bisexual* and *transgender* (as outlined in the definition section above) are the most commonly used and accepted terms.

Don't use other terms or slang words as these may cause offence.

## OVERVIEW OF THE NEEDS AND ISSUES

Young gays and lesbians grow up in a society where the prevailing culture is predominately heterosexual.

TV, films, magazines, newspapers, manuals and popular music generally promote a view that heterosexuality is the only acceptable form of sexuality, or at least the assumed form of sexuality.<sup>1</sup>

Both heterosexism and homophobia are common in our society.

**Heterosexism** is a term used to describe a belief system that does not value gay and lesbian lifestyles equally with heterosexual lifestyles.

**Homophobia** is a term used to describe fear or intolerance of homosexuality.

Young people who become aware that they are gay or lesbian can experience their adolescence as a confusing time, as they try to make sense of their feelings and how they fit into mainstream society.

Some young people are aware of these feelings at quite a young age, while some people don't come to this awareness until much later in life.<sup>8, 10</sup>

Many gays and lesbians decide to “come out”, that is openly identify as gay or lesbian.

It is important to remember that not all young people who experience feelings of attraction for the same or both sexes have come out. They may have told no one about their feelings or perhaps only one or two trusted people.

In an Australian survey of 748 gay and lesbian young people aged 14-21 years it was revealed that 1 in 5 had not told anyone about their sexuality, 28% had told their mothers and only 16% had told their fathers. Friends were the most likely to be told.<sup>9</sup>

Many young people question their sexuality during adolescence. This is a normal part of adolescent development. Just because someone is experiencing a same sex attraction does not mean that they will identify as gay or lesbian.

The way that you generally talk to young people you work with about sexual identity can help young gays and lesbians feel accepted, or it can reinforce a message that they are different. For example, it is better to ask a young person “have you got a partner” or “have you got someone special in your life?” rather than ask “have you got a boyfriend?” or “have you got a girlfriend?”.

Start with the assumption that some of the young people you work with will be gay or lesbian and that some of these young people



## WORKING WITH ... **GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL & TRANSGENDER YOUNG PEOPLE**

may not have come out or be ready to discuss their sexuality with you.

Young gays and lesbians may experience a strong sense of isolation because everyone they know appears to be heterosexual. Questions from family and friends about future plans for marriage or children can reinforce these feelings of isolation. <sup>8, 9</sup>

Our society places strong expectations on young people about appropriate gender roles and behaviour. Many young people, such as young people who are transgender, can feel strong pressure from family, friends and the wider community to adopt these roles and behaviours.

Some gay and lesbian young people may feel angry at themselves for their orientation or even hate themselves. They may withdraw from their friends, family or school to avoid real or perceived rejection and turn to drugs or alcohol in order to cope with how they are feeling. <sup>9, 10, 15</sup>

Depression, self-harm, suicide and homelessness is significantly higher among young gays and lesbians than the general youth population. <sup>10, 15</sup>

There are a number of Australian laws which do not recognise the de facto relationships of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people. This include access to pensions and superannuation, taxation and social security and the right to marriage. <sup>17</sup>

Many gay and lesbian young people do not feel safe enough to openly express affection for their partner in public (such as holding hands) because they fear discrimination, harassment and violence from the public.

An Australian study of lesbians and gay men found that 70% had experienced physical abuse, threats of violence or verbal abuse in

a public place. 11% of females and 20% of males reported being assaulted. <sup>12</sup>

### **PRACTICAL TIPS**

#### **Dealing with bullying and harassment at your service**

One of the major issues affecting gay and lesbian young people is bullying, discrimination and harassment.

This type of behaviour can, understandably, have a major impact on a young person's self esteem and self acceptance.

Young gays and lesbians frequently face harassment and even violence from peers, at school, on the streets or from family members.

In a recent national survey of gay and lesbian young people, 44% had experienced verbal abuse and 16% had been physically assaulted because of their sexuality. 74% of this abuse had occurred at schools. <sup>10</sup>

Young people who had been abused fared worse on almost every indicator of health and well being than those who had not. <sup>10</sup>

Young gays and lesbians often fear rejection and harassment from other people.

You need to make sure that your service is a safe place for everyone. It is your legal responsibility to make sure that your service is safe for everyone.

Your service can have group rules such as "this is a safe place", "no hassling or put downs", "treat other people with respect" or "no discrimination".

Clearly state that homophobia, racism and sexism will not be tolerated.



Bullying, “jokes” or harassment may occur in groups of young people. This type of behaviour is completely unacceptable. It is against the law and can have a major impact on the emotional wellbeing of young people.

Take immediate steps to address this type of behaviour whenever it occurs.

It is the responsibility of all workers to ensure your service is safe.

In many cases young gay men and young lesbians have not come out yet. They may feel offended by comments or “jokes” but they would have to identify themselves as homosexual in order to complain, so they don’t.

Never ignore bullying, “jokes”, harassment or violence because this sends a message that this type of behaviour is approved.

For example, “that’s so gay” is commonly used as an expression by young people to mean that something is broken, stupid or ridiculous.

If young people use slang (offensive) words to refer to gay and lesbian people talk to them about this.

By addressing the behaviour, you can send a message to the group that the behaviour is not OK, you can get young people to think about their attitude to homosexuality, and you can send a message of acceptance to any gay or lesbian young person who is in the group.

The best approach is to be supportive and encourage discussion and awareness raising, rather than being aggressive. Take small steps.

You should have policies in place to deal with discrimination and make sure that your staff and volunteers know about the policies and how to implement them.

Several organisations such as Twenty10 and the Diverse Sexuality Project run training programs for organisations.

### **Promoting a supportive environment**

One way of promoting an accepting and welcoming environment is to display visual material which shows your support for gay and lesbian young people. This may include flyers about gay and lesbian support groups and anti-violence initiatives, and safe place stickers (a pink triangle).

You could also have the rules clearly displayed stating the group rules and that the centre does not accept homophobia, racism or sexism.

This helps send a strong non-verbal message of safety to young people.

### **Legal issues**

Many workers are uncertain about the legal issues regarding homosexuality. The Hawkesbury Nepean Community Legal Centre has produced an easy to read manual about these issues. You can contact them to get a free copy (details are at the back of this section).

Some youth workers discriminate against young gay men and lesbians without even realising it. For example, by being concerned about two young gay men having sex but not being concerned about a straight couple having sex. A useful way to think about such concerns is to ask yourself: “Would I be thinking this way if the situation was heterosexual?”. If the answer is no then you are probably discriminating.

Many people are not aware that the legal age of consent is now 16 years for both males



and females, and for both homosexual and heterosexual sex.

### **Personal beliefs about homosexuality**

Some people have personal beliefs that do not value or accept homosexuality. Some people also follow religious teachings that do or do not value homosexuality.

It is important to be aware of your own beliefs and how these can impact on your work with young people.

Your duty of care and professional responsibility is one of acceptance, respect and support for all people.

Most workers, regardless of their personal beliefs, have a strong commitment to creating a safe and respectful place for young people. This can be a useful framework to use in thinking about how you should work with young gays and lesbians.

These values of safety and respect can also be reiterated to young people through group rules

### **If a young person tells you that they are gay or lesbian**

It takes a lot of courage for a young person to start talking about their feelings for the first time.

They will probably be feeling anxious about how you will react and whether you will reject them.

The most important thing to do is to show that you still accept, respect and value them as a person.

Use the young person's words as a guide

and avoid the temptation to push them into a particular definition or decision.

For example: Young woman "I think I'm attracted to girls"

In the example above, the young woman may be saying that she is bi-sexual, or a lesbian or exploring her sexuality.

Try and engage the young person in a conversation and be non-judgemental.

There is no need for a young person to be rushed into a definition of their sexuality.

A young person may be feeling upset, or alternatively very comfortable, about their sexuality. Be guided by the young person's feelings. It is important to find out how they are feeling as this will guide you in how you can respond.

Recent research of 1449 gay and lesbian young people found that 76% said that they felt good or great about their sexuality, 19% reported feeling OK and 5% felt bad or really bad.<sup>10</sup>

Don't assume that the young person will immediately want to come out. You should not pressure them to come out. Your role as a worker is to explore whether they want to come out. If they do, encourage them to think about the implications of coming out before they take any action.

Negative implications of coming out may include :

Rejection or discrimination by their friends, family, school or workplace.

Positive implications of coming out may include :

A greater level of self acceptance, feeling

## WORKING WITH ... **GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL & TRANSGENDER YOUNG PEOPLE**



stronger, more confident, or no longer afraid that others will find out.

Always refer the young person to a specialist service for further advice and support.

Before coming out, a young person needs to think about:

- who they will tell (they may only want to tell a close friend or family member)
- when they will tell them
- how they will tell them
- who will tell them
- how to handle the situation if the response is not positive.

It may take some time for a young person to consider all of these issues, rather than these decisions being made in a single conversation.<sup>1</sup>

The young person is likely to experience a range of both positive and negative reactions from their family, friends and peer group.<sup>9</sup>

It can be particularly difficult for young people to come out in rural areas where they may not have any role models, where a lower level of confidentiality exists and where they do not have access to the same level of support services or information.<sup>8</sup>

There are a number of telephone counselling services that can be of great assistance to gay and lesbian young people in rural areas (details at the back of this section).

If a young person needs support, give them the contact details for:

- any local support groups
- the Gay & Lesbian Counselling Service
- PFLAG: Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays.

PFLAG will provide support to young people who are considering coming out to their parents. They also provide support for parents who are coming to terms with their child's orientation.

Research has found that two thirds of mothers and half of all fathers are supportive when their child discloses their sexual preference to them.<sup>1</sup>

You might feel uncomfortable talking about sexuality with a young person. Young people's sexuality can be a taboo topic in our culture and homosexuality can be even more taboo. If you feel uncomfortable or nervous you can simply say something like:

"I'm feeling a bit unsure about this because I've never talked to someone about this before. Let's keep talking so we can figure out how to make sure you are supported".

They may have noticed you seem a bit uncomfortable, and might be worried that you will reject them. Saying this lets the young person know why you are uncomfortable, while showing that you still have a positive regard for them as a person.

Remember that the young person has made a disclosure to you because they trust you and your professionalism.

Keep a young person's disclosure as confidential. The decision to tell others belongs to the young person.



## **COMMON MYTHS**

### **Myth 1: Being gay and lesbian means that you are having sex**

Some people assume that because someone has a gay or lesbian orientation, they are having sex. Many young gays and lesbians have never had a sexual experience but still experience a homosexual orientation. In the same way many heterosexual young people have never had a sexual experience but still experience a heterosexual orientation.

### **Myth 2: Gay and lesbian young people are promiscuous**

Some people assume that gays or lesbians are promiscuous or have many different partners. This is a misconception. Some gay and lesbian people have many partners, some have a few and some aren't having sex, just like other young people!

### **Myth 3: Gay and lesbian young people don't need information about contraception**

Some young people who identify as same sex attracted may have sex with people of the opposite sex. There are many reasons why people (both homosexual and heterosexual) choose to have sex. Sometimes these reasons are based on feelings of sexual attraction, at other times these reasons may include the need for companionship, peer group pressure, societal expectations etc.

A recent study found that 10% of 15-18 year old young women who identify as same sex attracted had been pregnant. This rate of pregnancy is higher than the national rate for young women generally at 8% (as identified in the national secondary school study).

Same sex attracted young women and men need information about contraception as much as other young people. <sup>10</sup>

WORKING WITH ... **GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL & TRANSGENDER YOUNG PEOPLE**



.....

.....

# Gay, lesbian, bisexual & transgender young people

## How accessible is your service?

---

**Use this checklist to identify how you can improve your service for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender young people**

### Staff and volunteer awareness

- Staff and volunteers have received training about working with gay and lesbian young people . . . . .  Yes  No
- Staff and volunteers model inclusive language when speaking to clients about relationships and sexuality . . . . .  Yes  No
- Staff and volunteers know how to respond to a young person who is considering “coming out” . . . . .  Yes  No
- Staff and volunteers have an accurate understanding of legal issues for young gays and lesbians . . . . .  Yes  No

### A welcoming environment

- Your service has policies and rules in place to deal with bullying and harassment . . . . .  Yes  No
- Your service actively promotes a message of safety and respect . . . . .  Yes  No

### Partnerships and networks

- You have a referral list of services for gay and lesbian young people and their families . . . . .  Yes  No
- Your service displays information about gay and lesbian support services .  Yes  No

WORKING WITH ... **GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL & TRANSGENDER YOUNG PEOPLE**



.....

.....

# Contact Services

---

## Services in the Nepean

---

### Diverse Sexualities Access Project

**Phone:** (02) 4721 5024

**Address:** PO Box 627, Penrith, NSW,

**Email:** [outsidein@pnc.com.au](mailto:outsidein@pnc.com.au)

**Web:** [www.spyns.org.au](http://www.spyns.org.au)

**Description:** The Diverse Sexualities Access Project aims to improve access to community and generalist services by gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) young people in the Penrith, Blue Mountains and Hawkesbury Local Government Areas

---

### Community Legal Centre, Hawkesbury-Nepean

**Phone:** (02) 4588 5618

**Address:** 13 Bosworth Street, Richmond

**Email:** [Hawkesbury\\_NSW@fcl.fl.asn.au](mailto:Hawkesbury_NSW@fcl.fl.asn.au)

**Description:** The Legal Centre has produced a legal guide for health, youth and community organisations, local Councils and funding providers about working with young gays and lesbians.

---

### Way Out (Young Men's Sexual Health project), The Warehouse Youth Health Centre

**Phone:** (02) 4721 8330

**Address:** 13 Reserve St, Penrith 2750

**Web:** [www.fpahealth.org.au/services/local/warehouse.html](http://www.fpahealth.org.au/services/local/warehouse.html)

**Description:** A Young Men's Sexual Health project which provides counselling and social support for young men up to 25 years who are dealing with issues in regards to their sexuality, health and identity, health information and referral advice. The project also trains services in supporting same sex attracted youth.

---

### PFLAG - Parents and Friends of Lesbians And Gays - Western Sydney

**Phone:** (02) 9294 1002  
(Information line)

Penrith Branch (02) 4730 4660

**Address:** PO Box 5027,  
Kingsdene, NSW, 2118

**Email:** [help@pflagaustralia.org](mailto:help@pflagaustralia.org)

**Website:** [www.pflagaustralia.org](http://www.pflagaustralia.org)

**Description:** PFLAG stands for Parents and Friends of Lesbians And Gays. PFLAG offers help, support and information to families, friends and all gay people.

---

### Queer Space – Upper Mountains Youth Centre

**Email:** [queerspace@hotmail.com](mailto:queerspace@hotmail.com)

**Web:** [www.queerspace.info](http://www.queerspace.info)

**Description:** QueerSpace is a social support group for young gay/same sex attracted men (25 years and younger) in the Blue Mountains. QueerSpace meets fortnightly on Fridays at the Upper Mountains Youth Centre.

---

## Statewide Services

---

### Twenty10 - Gay & Lesbian Youth Support

**Phone:** 1800 65 2021

**Web:** [www.twenty10.org.au](http://www.twenty10.org.au)

**Description:** Twenty 10 is an organisation for young gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people who are having problems at home or have become homeless. Through promoting a safe and supportive environment, Twenty 10 can work with young people in dealing with acceptance issues as well as providing support services to help young people gain independence.

---



---

**Gay & Lesbian Counselling Service of NSW**

**Phone:** 1800 184 527

**Web:** [www.glcsnsw.org.au](http://www.glcsnsw.org.au)

**Description:** This service is a volunteer based community service providing free, anonymous and confidential telephone counselling, information & referral services and support groups for gay men, lesbians, bisexual and transgender persons (GLBT) throughout New South Wales (NSW) on sexuality and life issues.

---

**Lesbian & Gay Anti-Violence Project**

**Phone:** (02) 9206 2116

**Email:** [avp@acon.org.au](mailto:avp@acon.org.au)

**Web:** <http://avp.acon.org.au>

**Description:** The Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project (AVP) offers a range of services to individuals and to the gay and lesbian community in general. Their website covers a range of issues related to violence, homophobic and otherwise, as experienced by gay and lesbian communities and attempts to give practical strategies for avoiding and dealing with violence.

---

**Gay & Lesbian Rights Lobby**

**Phone:** (02) 9360 6650

**Web:** [www.glrll.org.au](http://www.glrll.org.au)

**Description:** The Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby works to protect and promote the rights of lesbians and gay men living in New South Wales

# References

---

1. ALSO Foundation, *Alsorts: A sexuality awareness resource*, <http://www.also.org.au/discover/projectsandservices/alsorts2ndedition.htm>
2. Barbeler, V, *Challenging homophobia in youth welfare*, Mosaics, Youth Action & Policy Association
3. Better Health, *Gay male issues, Lesbian issues, Bisexuality*, 2004, [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Gay\\_male\\_issues?OpenDocument - 27k - 6 Jul 2005](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Gay_male_issues?OpenDocument-27k-6%20Jul%202005)
4. Bingham, A, *Camp Queer*, YAPRap, May/June 2004, Youth Action & Policy Association, <http://www.yapa.org.au>
5. Blazey, S & Manning, M, *Working with young gays and lesbians? The legal manual for health, youth & community organisations, local councils & funding providers in NSW*, 2002, Hawkesbury Nepean Community Legal Centre
6. Emma, *Dykelation, 12 to 25*, 1992, Youth Action & Policy Association
7. Gardner, K, *What is homophobia?*, Mosaics, Youth Action & Policy Association
8. Here for Life Youth Sexuality Project, *Someone you love: Information for parents, friends and family of young gay, lesbian or bisexual young people*, [www.freedom.org.au/downloads/someone\\_you\\_love.pdf](http://www.freedom.org.au/downloads/someone_you_love.pdf)
9. Hillier, L, *It's a catch 22: same sex attracted young people on coming out to parents*, Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health & Society, La Trobe University, <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/ssay>
10. Hillier, L (et al), *Writing themselves in again: 6 years on. The 2<sup>nd</sup> national report on the sexuality, health & well being of same sex attracted young people in Australia*, 2005, Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health & Society, La Trobe University, <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/ssay>
11. Hillier, L & Harrison, L, *The girls in our town: sex, love, relationships and rural life*, 1999, in *Challenging rural practice: human services in Australia*, Deakin University, <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/ssay>
12. Mason, G, *Violence against lesbians and gay men*, 1993, Australian Institution of Criminology, <http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/vpt/vpt2.html>
13. Murray, D, *Addressing homophobia and sex based discrimination in schools*, Youth Studies Australia, 2001, <http://www.acys.utas.edu.au/ysa/contents/volume20-1.htm>
14. NSW Association for Adolescent Health, *Young People and Sexuality*, <http://www.naah.org.au/policy.htm>
15. NSW Health, *Young People's Health – Our Future*, 1999, [www.health.nsw.gov.au/health-public-affairs/youthhealth](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/health-public-affairs/youthhealth)
16. Ollis, D (et al) *Safety in our schools: strategies for responding to homophobia*, Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University
17. Parents and Friends of Lesbian & Gays, *Keeping Families Together*, <http://www.pflagaustralia.org>
18. Pallotta-Chiarolli, M, *Queerly raised and queer friendly students: What do they think?* Youth Studies Australia v.19, n.4, 2000, pp.34-40, <http://www.acys.utas.edu.au/ysa/contents/volume19-4.htm#RTFToC10>
19. Public Interest Advocacy Centre, *Sexuality Rights*, <http://www.piac.asn.au/>



## WORKING WITH ... **GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL & TRANSGENDER YOUNG PEOPLE**

---

publications/pubs/sexuality\_20040604.html

20. Reynolds, R, *Diverse Sexualities Access Project, Consultation with Christian workers, Discussion Paper*, 2004, South Penrith Youth & Neighbourhood Services, <http://www.spyns.org.au>

21. Tahija, K & Kapetanovic, V, *GLBT: More than a club sandwich!* November 2003, YAPRap, Youth Action & Policy Association, <http://www.yapa.org.au>