



News and Views

Working It Out Inc. is eleven years old this year. I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge your support to provide this unique service for the LGBTI communities of Tasmania.

The organisation's core business has grown from supporting young gays (and lesbians) coming out to supporting all people questioning their gender and or sexuality. We also support family and friends of our community associated with coming out. And as we all know we don't just come out once – it continues throughout our lives.

Our clients also include school communities and other educational institutions, service providers including medical services and government departments to develop safe environments everywhere for GLBTI people. It is very exciting that organisations and institutions are increasingly prepared to ask for training, knowing it is their responsibility, not that of the one gay in the village.

As is the case with all non-government organisations we must also manage increasing demands of funding agencies in all areas of management and governance and be accountable to you our members!

Our work is now broader, client issues more complex and the demand is greater. Increasingly our work focus is gender identity issues, not just sexuality and this is the case in schools as well. People feel there is the support out there to address gender questioning and this is something to celebrate. This is a challenging field – no question. We are going where others fear to tread, swimming uncharted waters.

Our commitment to constant quality improvement, strengths based approach to the services we provide and the experience we have gained over these 11 years make us determined to meet the demands that are put to us. We are strong – we have a great team with a state-wide Committee of Management supporting the team to do the work and achieve our goals. Your support as members, understanding why we are here and what we do, and championing the organisation, are invaluable to us.

Working It Out is Tasmania's only service specifically for lesbian, gay, bisexual, intersex and transgender Tasmanians.

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WIO 10th Birthday celebrations in Burnie, Launceston and Hobart

“Working It Out” celebrated its 10th birthday last year with a dinner in Burnie and Hobart and a BBQ lunch on Tamar Island in Launceston. It was great to see so many people attending state-wide. While listening to the speeches it was good to hear how far we have come in the last 10 years and how many people, in particular, on the North West Coast, had felt like the “only gay in the village” where today there are so many people “out and proud.”

It was attended by over 40 people, many of whom expressed astonishment at the changes they have seen. There was also the reminder that we have a long way to go. The celebration was attended by one young person (under 25). Some people were not comfortable with their photo being taken at such an event BUT THEY WERE THERE! Thank you to the staff and CoM who made these celebrations such a success. In Burnie there was a tribute to Yvette Sneddon, and a scholarship established in her name. Stories were presented about the contribution that she made to the GLBTI community on the North West Coast, both before WIO was formed and after, when she was on our Management Committee.

Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays

Working It Out brings Shelly Argent from PFLAG in QLD to Tasmania

“PFLAG, even though primarily a support group for parents, strives to support lesbians, gays, bisexuals transgender and intersex people who are, or fear they may be, abandoned by their families. We do this by providing information to them while they are going through the process of "coming out" and later provide support and information for their families. For those who are not accepted, they know they are welcome and supported by our group.”

Brisbane mother, Shelley Argent who is National Spokesperson for Parents with lesbian daughters and gay sons visited Tasmania in late April to talk with parents who wanted to understand their loved ones sexual diversity and to promote awareness and acceptance in the general community. The tour was a great success and provided an opportunity for the community to meet Committee of Management members. There were meetings in Hobart at WIO, Launceston, Deloraine and Burnie.

It was a very useful and productive week with Shelley. And our thanks go to her for sharing her knowledge and time so generously with us. From Shelley’s perspective she found it a well-organised tour. She was very pleased to find so many publicity opportunities organised for her. The media picked up the story with an article and photo in the Mercury and an ABC interview on statewide radio and an article in the Advocate.

A project for young people

We have done this project because.....

Young people need a say because otherwise they get frustrated.

We want other young people to think “we should do that” and then they can be in the exhibition next year. We are part of the community too.

We want more ‘get togethers’ with queer youth. Next year we are going to plan for lots of prep time. Some of us want to do photography, nude life painting or drawing.

We want to get the word out for next time— and we want more awareness of things happening all the time – we want to know what’s on and know where to find out. Some times there are things on and we just don’t hear about it.

In October 2008 young people from the North and Northwest took part in a series of badge-making activities in preparation for workshops with community artist Jeanine Carter. Harley Martin from Wynyard on Tasmania’s Northwest coast was one of the students who participated in the arts project. Helped by arts worker Jeanine Carter, Harley and others made badges with the theme of GLBTI identity.

Harley got involved with Working It Out through his school counsellor. “I was having a few problems, with sexuality issues,” he says. “It feels secluded here, and meeting other GLBT people helped a lot, just being there, talking to people and making contacts.”

For the art project, Harley created a number of badges, adding words like “encourage” and “family”. His mentor during the badge-making process, Jeanine Carter, is a Melbourne-based arts worker. “We looked at what they wanted to say about being a young person and being gay,” Jeanine says, “rather than just looking at the craft. We looked at words, the words they used to describe being gay in remote areas. Words like isolation, discrimination. But positive words came through too, like “family” and “friends”.

“We said, ‘We’ve got all these words, what are some symbols?’ They had to think through the process and that led to asking things like what isolation is and what could symbolise that? Being out? A door and being outside – a classic is hiding in the closet, or having the door slam in your face.”

Jeanine says she was impressed by the ideas and thinking of the group members, some of whom travelled three hours to be part of the project: “They were really positive. Sometimes groups focus on the negative but these young people were incredibly positive. They said their family was very important to them. They said, ‘We live in locations where we’re the only gay people.’”

The resulting Working It Out badge entry was displayed at the Moonah Arts Centre in Launceston. The young people involved in this creative enterprise met together in Launceston to attend the Artfully Queer exhibition. Seeing our badges on display and catching up with each other again was great and the display itself came together really well.

What can we learn from you?

In May this year WIO employed a consultant to conduct a Needs Analysis for the organisation. We sought input from our members, service users, other service providers, government departments and schools. People were able to respond either through an on-line survey or by participating in focus groups around the state. The key questions addressed through the review were

1. What would it take for WIO to better connect with people who could use our services?
2. Are there any barriers to using WIO services?
3. What support or education services are missing at WIO?
4. How could WIO improve its existing support and education services?
5. What is WIO doing well?

The Executive Officer travelled with consultant, Suzi Quixley from Mon May 11th till May 15th with meetings in Hobart, Launceston, Deloraine and Burnie. It provided another excellent opportunity to meet and discuss issues with people across the regions. The EO's role was to introduce the consultant and provide some background after which I left to provide space for frank discussion.

The Committee of Management has prioritised this project in order to gain information and clarification around the work of the organisation. We look forward to presenting the findings of the report to stakeholders in the near future.

Anti-discrimination education in schools

In 2008, the Executive Officer and Educator/Counsellors from each region worked together to develop an education program for Tasmanian school students. In late 2008 the new program was piloted at Rosetta High School with four grade 9 classes.

This initiative, Challenging Homophobia, Affirming Diversity (CHAD), is an eight-week program that explores the nature of difference and diversity. CHAD aims to promote respect and inclusion within school communities; and provide skills to combat discrimination based on gender identity or sexual orientation and to celebrate human diversity in local communities.

Feedback about the program was excellent; with many students and staff members commenting on the things they had learned. One Rosetta student who had attended our gender diversity programs the previous year called in on us when she heard that we were again visiting the school to say how much the program had meant to her.

These kinds of events are a good reminder of the potential power of our work in schools. One critical session of the program is the opportunity to listen to and ask questions of a panel of same sex attracted young people enabling people to gain a real understanding of their life experience.

The Questions asked by the students of the same sex attracted panel members included:

- Was it comfortable coming out?
- Has being gay changed your life completely?
- How do you feel being gay? Are you happy being who you are?
- When did you first decide to say that you were gay?
- Should people who choose to be gay be treated different from people who are born gay?

Some of the quotes from students at the end of the program were:

The upside is:

- That all the brain dead homophobes in our grade actually learnt something. Although you can guarantee that not all of them will change their views, I think the programme changed the views of a few. It was also really good that all the mentors/ instructors were friendly and open with us.
- The people running it, sharing their stories with our grade.
- The positive is that I learnt a lot about people who are gay and accept them better because it's who they are.
- That it has given me a better understanding of everything.
- All the people running it knew a lot about what they were teaching and all did very well with answering questions as best they could.
- Making badges.

- Enjoyed making badges. I learnt about different people.
- Everything was positive about the program.
- That we have learnt about the differences in other people, and what others can go through.
- Learning about differences.
- The positive things are people willing to share such unique stories expressing themselves in front of a large unknown group.

Connect4life

I'm a volunteer with Connect4life and our group has had some FUN events this year, bringing communities together and just having a great time. We have had many friendly get-togethers over dinner or a BBQ and it is great to see more people coming along.

Music On The Green on the 7th of February at Mole Creek was a huge success again this year and we plan to make it an annual event on the first Saturday in February. Over 50 people attended. It was a great way to spend a relaxing afternoon and evening with Middle Eastern drumming and belly dancers, a jukebox and a musician with many of us dancing well into the night. We had an auction with all items donated and a dinner with a volunteer caterer and it was excellent food.

I cannot thank enough, everyone for their donations on the day and the volunteers that jumped in and made the day a great success. I am very proud to work beside so many dynamic and supportive people.

We have an Auction every few months at one of our events and we run raffles, so donations can be dropped into any of the WIO offices. The money that we Fund raise goes to WIO so a very worthy cause.

Ring or email if you are interested in going on our email list at north@workingitout.org.au

Sharon Jones

Last year Connect4life events included Xmas in July, Music on the Green, and a breakfast in Mole Creek, 18 monthly dinners, 6 monthly barbecues, 15 monthly lunches, 1 afternoon tea in the North and the North West, 2 Rainbow Warehouse parties and a walk in Deloraine.

We also organised a group to go to a Winter Hafla, the Theatre Bombshells and Strangers in Between theatre visit in Launceston.

In Devonport we went to see "Menopause the Musical.

If you want to know what's happening contact Sharon at northwest@workingitout.org.au today!

A book reviewed

The Boy in the Dress by David Walliams, illustrated by Quentin Blake

Published by Harper Collins, 2008.

From the pen of well-known British comedian David Walliams (aka co-star of Little Britain) comes this quaint and mildly charming novel about a twelve-year old boy Dennis and his newly-found pleasures of dressing up and wearing contemporary women's fashions. Dennis is portrayed in the story as an ordinary boy living in an ordinary single-parent family whose life dramatically changes when he befriends local fashion aficionado Lisa at their secondary school.

Through their friendship and Lisa's flair for dress-design, Dennis discovers the new delights of wearing and modelling women's fashions, from sequins to high heels and beyond. However, events take a turn for the worst when Lisa challenges Dennis to pass as her French pen pal Denise at school in front of his peers...

This is a humorous story that will appeal to readers of all ages and will be a natural attraction for fans of Williams' comedy routines. The plot is significantly brought to life through Quentin Blake's unique style of illustrating, made famous through the Roald Dahl novels for children. As his first novel, Williams explores a number of important themes at a surface level, including the separation of parents and the grief of family change, and the freedom to express difference and diversity in an often gender-confined world.

Some heartfelt relationships are developed, particularly between Dennis and his father, with some amusing dialogue played out between Dennis and the corner shopkeeper and local spin-merchant Raj. My one reservation is Williams' occasional address to the reader which I found intrusive and a little annoying in places.

This novel is by no means a staggering or profound read and the resolution of this story is somewhat predictable. These criticisms aside, *The Boy in the Dress* is a highly accessible and light-hearted romp that will resonate with readers who like to live just outside the norm. In particular, it would make an enlightening read for older primary and secondary students as it reinforces some affirming messages about celebrating diversity in gender expression.

I'm giving this novel three Vogues out of five.

Interested?? You can borrow this novel from the WIO library in Hobart.

Just drop in or give us a call. This novel is also listed in the Tasmanian State Library catalogue.