Opening the Door? Exploratory research into lgbt young people's access to supported accommodation in Queensland.

Elyse Maberley and Pauline Coffey, 2005.

About the cover design

All the colours of the rainbow have their own meaning. To me it's like my other Australian flag. Its part of me and it's a part I'm proud of and these are all my strengths that I have as I look at the lovely colours! It's a rainbow. And it kind of has that connotation of reaching the end of the rainbow, finding your goal – depends in what you see in it really! And obviously it's the gay flag, but for me it's a big thing about pride.

Its just safety - about having a safe place to call home. And also that the house is pretty boxy because lots of youth accommodation is pretty basic.

Skye, 2004.

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Executive Summary

The experience of young people who are homeless and identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender (lgbt) is an under-explored area. Young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness, face multiple challenges. One of these is to seek and access appropriate accommodation and support.

A partnership was formed between Queensland Youth Housing Coalition (QYHC) and Open Doors Youth Service Inc. to seek a greater understanding of and to document the experiences and issues of both lgbt young people and SAAP service providers. A project Reference Group was formed that supported the exploratory research processes.

Opening the Door? Exploratory research into lgbt young people's access to supported accommodation in Queensland documents the experiences of ten lgbt young people who have accessed Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) services and twenty-three youth SAAP services across Queensland.

Young peoples views

The lgbt young people interviewed for this project clearly expressed that the decision to disclose their sexuality or gender identity to service providers and other young people within services is a complex and significant issue. The factors that impacted on young people's decision making in regard to disclosure of their identities were:

- assessment of the service providers and other residents lgbt 'friendliness';
- choosing not to disclose their sexuality/gender identity to maintain safety, and;
- choosing not to disclose because of the lack of privacy amongst young people in the 'homeless sector'.

The interviews with lgbt young people also revealed the following information about their experiences of accessing youth SAAP services:

- lgbt young people stated that homophobia was directed toward them from other young people and some service providers;
- young men received threats and actual physical violence, whereas young women experienced sexual harassment and sexual intimidation;
- lgbt young people identified that transgender young people received the most extreme levels of harassment in both SAAP services and the general community;
- lgbt young people stated that in some services they felt they were treated less favourably than other young people because of explicitly critical comments about lgbt identities;
- lgbt young people identified youth worker and organisational practices that they perceived did not value them as lgbt people.

lgbt young people highlighted the challenges of being young and homeless. The lgbt young people were critical of the lack of housing options for young people in general and of organisational practices that forced their exit from services without follow-up or referral.

In contrast to the less favourable experiences, lgbt young people identified youth worker practices and organisational procedures of SAAP that are supportive and inclusive. These include:

- explicit recognition of lgbt issues in service intake procedures;
- inclusion of lgbt young people within service promotional material;
- workers challenging homophobic comments by other young people;
- the presence of 'out' youth workers as role models;
- services being comfortable with a diversity of young people and having strategies to value this diversity, and;
- services having knowledge of appropriate lgbt community resources.

Service provider views

Data from twenty-three SAAP service providers was gathered by questionnaire. The majority of services revealed that they had provided housing to lgbt young people. It is important to recognise that many of the issues confronting both service providers and lgbt young people are the same issues relevant to all young people. These issues include, but are not limited to:

- lack of housing stock;
- lack of housing choice;
- inadequate income support;
- poor access to employment and training;
- discrimination in the private rental market; and
- conflict with family.

There are however, unique issues faced by lgbt young people who access SAAP services. Service providers stated that young people not 'identifying' was an issue in providing support and articulated broader discriminatory societal or community attitudes and the effect these may have on this disclosure.

Discrimination, harassment and violence are key experiences of young lgbt homeless people. Discrimination was both institutionalized and peer-based. Responses from SAAP service providers revealed that just under a third of services do not have access and equity or diversity policy statements that specifically include lgbt young people.

One of the most significant challenges faced by service providers in providing housing to lgbt young people was that of peer acceptance. A considerable number of service providers cited peer acceptance, discrimination and homophobia as challenges to housing lgbt young people in their service. Approaches used to meet these challenges related to the key theme of employing youth work 'best practice' strategies.

Despite these challenges, approximately half of the service providers interviewed were unable to identify specific practices that assist with lgbt young people's access to housing.

Service providers cited education as being one of the strongest strategies for workers to further enhance the capacity of services to meet the needs of lgbt young people. The majority of service providers indicated that they would attend training about supporting lgbt young people in housing and that topics such as practicing use of appropriate language with young people and strategies to challenging homophobia would be highly relevant.

Recommendations

The *Opening the Door?* project has formed several recommendations at conclusion of this first stage of the project. The recommendations are for SAAP service providers, government agencies, training responses and further research. Phases Two and Three of *Opening the Door?* will further the responses to these recommendations.

SAAP Services
   Education
   ▪ Implement education strategies or enhance education strategies already in place that educate young people and service staff about non-prejudicial and non-discriminatory behaviour.
      o Educate young people and SAAP service providers about diverse sexuality and gender identity.
      o Educate young people and SAAP service providers about respect and non-discrimination.
   ▪ Encourage staff to attend training events relevant to lgbt young people.

   Sector Development
   ▪ Establish and maintain networks with other lgbt-friendly organisations to facilitate awareness of issues and training possibilities.

   Policy
   ▪ Develop and enact access and equity policies that explicitly cover the experiences of lgbt young people.
   ▪ Implement zero tolerance policies against violence, emotional maltreatment, and direct or inadvertent mistreatment. Provide policies with a strong stance against physical aggression and verbal harassment.
   ▪ Employ staff who demonstrate a commitment to foster the self-esteem

and self-acceptance of lgbt young people. Three strategies to achieve this end are:
- o Communication of anti-discrimination policies;
- o Recruitment and employment of a diversity of staff, including lgbt people; and
- o Assessment of attitudes during interviews.

Practice
- Use multiple strategies to communicate lgbt friendliness, including:
  - o Visual resources (posters, fliers and brochures).
  - o Challenge homophobic displays by young people visibly.
  - o Be aware of lgbt resources in the community and make referrals.
  - o State in intake process that the organisation does not tolerate discrimination.
  - o Do not assume that all young people are heterosexual.
- Have an lgbt counsellor or worker who attends SAAP services to support staff and young people.
- Have single rooms for privacy for transgender people.
- Support young people's exploration of sexual identity respecting their pace.

Government Agencies
- Establish an lgbt specific youth shelter in Queensland.
- Provide more housing for young people that is affordable.
- Undertake further research about youth homelessness in Queensland inclusive of lgbt young people.
- Establish data collection to reflect lgbt sexualities and not just heterosexuality.
- Develop an explicit framework of 'best practice' for youth SAAP service workers – in recognition of the original intention of the SAAP program to be wholly inclusive, accessible and flexible, and free of discrimination.
- Develop explicit guidelines for the appropriate accommodation of transgender young people in recognition of that fact that SAAP service capacity and infrastructure is not adequately resourced to respond to these clients.
- Encourage and promote greater government awareness of the challenges experienced by lgbt young people and the SAAP service providers who support them.

Training Responses
- Provide training to the Queensland youth SAAP services sector about the needs, issues and experiences of homeless lgbt young people.
- Establish a partnership with the relevant industry training bodies to develop and implement training to the youth SAAP sector.
- Ensure that training developed is offered across Queensland and not limited to the South East.

- Ensure that the topics and issues identified by service providers and young people through this exploratory research provide a basis of training development and delivery.

Further Research

This research project is exploratory of the issues and experiences of lgbt young people and youth housing service providers within a Queensland context. A number of areas, highlighted through this project, warrant further research efforts. They are:

- Experiences of lgbt young people who live across Queensland in order to compare to the experiences to Brisbane based young people.
- Experiences of transgender young people.
- Experiences of young people from diverse cultural and indigenous backgrounds who also identify as lgbt.
- Evaluative research into service provider perceptions of and responses to the needs of lgbt young people accessing SAAP services.

Project Background

The *Opening the Door?* research report began life in March 2004 as a collaborative 'think tank' around the issues of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (**lgbt**) young people and their access to Supported Accommodation Assistance Programs (**SAAP**) services.

From what was originally intended to be a series of fact-sheets and information publications, the *Opening the Door?* project life-cycle and scope grew when the Reference Group and project team were unable to locate any Queensland-based research dedicated to the issues of lgbt young people and housing or homelessness.

This research is the first phase in what is intended to be a project encompassing not only research findings, but also the later development and delivery of training programs addressing the ways of supporting and improving lgbt young people's access to housing services.

The publication of this research signals the completion of Phase 1 of the project. The goal of this report is to increase service provider and government awareness of the issues facing lgbt young people with regard to housing. It is intended that the findings contained in this report will be used to generate training and education content as well as promotional/educational resources.

Figure 1: Opening the Door Project

Opening the Door? Project

PHASE 1 — Exploratory Research Undertaken and Report Published

PHASE 2 — Development and Implementation of Training for Service Providers

PHASE 3 — Development and Distribution of Educational and Promotional Resources
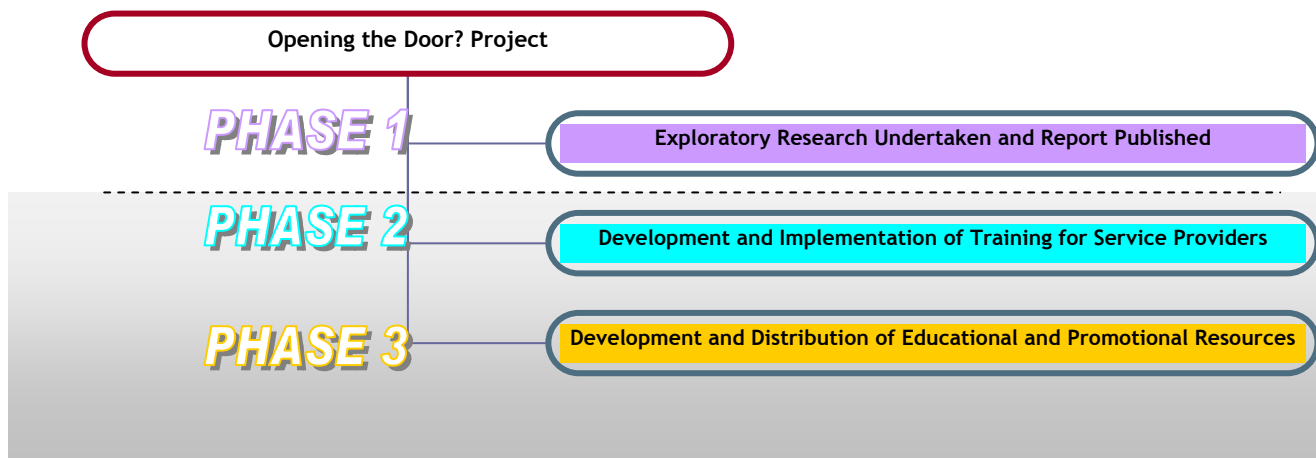
Project Partners

Queensland Youth Housing Coalition
Queensland Youth Housing Coalition (QYHC) is a not-for-profit organisation that is formed through the coalition of organisations and individuals advocating for and improving young people's housing options and related issues. QYHC has been operational since 1984 and contributes at both policy and service delivery levels to the provision of services for homeless and at risk of homelessness young people. QYHC has a number of functions:

- Delivers the Youth Support Coordinator Hub Program across Queensland via the Hub Facilitators;
- Acts as an information resource for young people and those involved in young people's housing and related issues;
- Provides information and training through forums and workshops;
- Networks with other peak bodies and statewide organisations;
- Educates and assists local communities to assess young people's housing needs and to develop appropriate youth housing policy;
- Initiates and participates in research projects;
- Advocates on behalf of young people;
- Participates in national issues through involvement with the National Youth Coalition for Housing (NYCH) and Australian Federation of Homeless Organisations (AFHO).

Open Doors Youth Service Inc.
Open Doors is a Reconnect service funded by the Federal Department of Family and Community Services and has been open since 2002. The target group for Open Doors is young people 18 years of age and under who are exploring, questioning or identifying as lgbt, and the families of these young people. Open Doors value and celebrate the legitimacy of lgbt identities and the diversity of lgbt culture and communities. Open Doors is committed to challenging homophobia, stereotypes and discrimination, providing community education and training to services across south-east Queensland to improve the awareness and capacity of networks and communities to respond to young lgbt people's needs. Open Doors work within the greater Brisbane area with young people who are experiencing difficulties at home, or feeling isolated and confused. Open Doors provide the following services:

- Individual counselling and support to young people exploring issues of sexuality and gender identity;
- Assistance with accommodation, links to employment or training and support to access appropriate health services;
- Support and information to the families and support networks of young people to enhance relationships and understanding, enabling young people to remain in the home environment, or at least maintain positive contact; and
- A drop-in centre for young people.

Project Reference Group

The *Opening the Door?* project team was assisted by a number of individuals whose insight, support and knowledge made the project possible. Informal assistance and expertise was provided by Maria Leebeek (QYHC) and Meagan Probert (Open Doors).

The Reference Group met five times within the year that the project was undertaken. The *Opening the Door?* Reference Group was comprised of the following individuals;

- Chris Miller   Youth Emergency Services
- Julianne McAlpine   Carina Youth Agency
- Jess James-Chadwick   Inala Youth and Family Support
- Steve Jeanneret   Integrated Family and Youth Service
- Natasha Boyle   Department of Communities
- Kerry Boman   Department of Communities
- Sharyn Kemp   Department of Housing
- Donna McAuliffe   University of Queensland
- Elyse Maberley   Queensland Youth Housing Coalition
- Pauline Coffey   Open Doors Youth Service

Recommendations

Opening the Door? Exploratory research into lgbt young people's access to supported accommodation in Queensland makes the following recommendations.

SAAP Services
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- Implement education strategies or enhance education strategies already in place that educate young people and service staff about non-prejudicial and non-discriminatory behaviour.
    - Educate young people and SAAP service providers about diverse sexuality and gender identity.
    - Educate young people and SAAP service providers about respect and non-discrimination.
- Encourage staff to attend training events relevant to lgbt young people.

Sector Development
- Establish and maintain networks with other lgbt-friendly organisations to facilitate awareness of issues and training possibilities.

Policy
- Develop and enact access and equity policies that explicitly cover the experiences of lgbt young people.
- Implement zero tolerance policies against violence, emotional maltreatment, and direct or inadvertent mistreatment. Provide policies with a strong stance against physical aggression and verbal harassment.
- Employ staff who demonstrate a commitment to foster the self-esteem and self-acceptance of lgbt young people. Three strategies to achieve this end are:
    - Communication of anti-discrimination policies;
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- Use multiple strategies to communicate lgbt friendliness, including:
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- Develop explicit guidelines for the appropriate accommodation of transgender young people in recognition of that fact that SAAP service capacity and infrastructure is not adequately resourced to respond to these clients.
- Encourage and promote greater government awareness of the challenges experienced by lgbt young people and the SAAP service providers who support them.

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- Provide training to the Queensland youth SAAP services sector about the needs, issues and experiences of homeless lgbt young people.
- Establish a partnership with the relevant industry training bodies to develop and implement training to the youth SAAP sector.
- Ensure that training developed is offered across Queensland and not limited to the South East.
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Further Research

This research project is exploratory of the issues and experiences of lgbt young people and youth housing service providers within a Queensland context. A number of areas, highlighted through this project, warrant further research efforts. They are:

- Experiences of lgbt young people who live across Queensland in order to compare to the experiences to Brisbane based young people.
- Experiences of transgender young people.
- Experiences of young people from diverse cultural and indigenous backgrounds who also identify as lgbt.
- Evaluative research into service provider perceptions of and responses to the needs of lgbt young people accessing SAAP services.

Setting the Scene

Age
The research project was guided by the accepted definition of youth being 12-25 years with the actual age range of young people who participated in the project being 15 - 21 years.

Homelessness
Much consideration and debate has been undertaken on the definition of homelessness in an Australian context. For the purposes of this report, the three levels of homelessness identified by Chamberlain and MacKenzie (2004:5) will be used as the definition of homelessness. These are:

Primary Homelessness – is the stereotypical definition of homeless. It is literally referring to those people with no shelter, who 'sleep rough' and live on the streets. It includes all people without conventional accommodation, such as people living on the streets, sleeping in parks, squatting in derelict buildings, or using cars or railway carriages for temporary shelter.

Secondary Homelessness – covers those people who frequently move between accommodation and by virtue of this fact their accommodation is always temporary. Secondary homelessness includes those people who live in SAAP services. People who are staying in boarding houses for the short term (which is defined as less than 12 weeks) are also part of the secondary homeless group.

Tertiary Homelessness – includes people who are living in boarding houses for terms of thirteen weeks or longer. Such accommodation can be without separate bedrooms or living rooms and include communal kitchens and bathrooms. The accommodation is not covered by a lease and thus is not considered secure. According to Chamberlain and MacKenzie these people are homeless because their accommodation does not have the characteristics identified in the minimum community standard.

In addition to this, the SAAP Act clearly states that "a person is also considered homeless if he or she is living in accommodation provided by a SAAP agency or some other form of emergency accommodation". (*Supported Accommodation Assistance Act (1994)* (Cth) s.4.3a).

Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP)
SAAP is the jointly funded Commonwealth, State and Territory program that is Australia's primary response to the needs of the homeless and those at-risk of homelessness. The aim of SAAP is to "...provide transitional supported accommodation and related support services, in order to help people who are homeless to achieve the maximum possible degree of self-reliance and independence" (*Supported Accommodation Assistance Act (1994)* (Cth) s.5.2). Youth SAAP services comprise a range of types from crisis accommodation to long-term youth housing.

Preferred Terms
Whilst it was not the intent of the project team to further 'label' or categorise the gender and sexuality expressions of young people, some terms of reference are necessary for the clear articulation of this research.

Opening the Door? has documented the experiences of young people who identify as lesbian gay, bisexual and/or transgender. Gay and lesbian refers to same-sex attraction and bisexual refers to attraction to both sexes. Transgender is a term to describe people whose gender identity is other than that attributed to them at birth. Transgender people may identify as heterosexual, lesbian, gay or bisexual as the term transgender describes a person's expression of gender identity rather than sexuality. These are simplified terms that describe only the basics of attraction and gender. The concept of identity formation is more complex as it is the interplay between attraction, behaviour, and the public and private expressions of these, as well as the dynamic exchange between cultural and societal influences.

It is estimated by the Australian Centre for Sex, Health and Society at La Trobe University in a research report of secondary school students that "a significant minority of young people are not unequivocally heterosexual, with numbers ranging between 8 and 11%" (Hillier, Dempsey, Harrison, Beale, Matthews & Rosenthal 1998).

Young people who are developing their identity and define it as 'other than heterosexual' do so within an environment that is primarily unsupportive. Heterosexism is a dominant concept within Australian culture, where is it assumed that everyone is heterosexual and that heterosexual relationships are superior. "There is a presumption of heterosexuality which is encoded in language, in institutional practices and the encounters of everyday life" (Epstein & Johnson 1994:198).

Levels of homophobia exist that may manifest on personal, interpersonal, cultural and institutional levels.

> "Gay men and lesbians experience cultural invisibility, they are routinely told that their innermost feelings and desires are disgusting, dangerous, just a phase or non-existent, they are denied civil and legal rights and the recognition of their partners and relationships, their consenting sexual relations are criminalised and policed and they are subject to verbal and physical harassment, bashings and even murders" (Flood 1997: presentation notes).

The less valued position of lgbt people within mainstream Australian communities has a significant impact on the processes of young people's decisions in regard to disclosure of their emerging or decided identities. Many lgbt young people, who fear discovery of their sexuality, will go to great lengths to avoid others finding out their sexual orientation, including avoiding same-sex peers. This leads to social isolation through a disruption to personal and familial relationships. This fear can be well founded as discovery of a young person's sexuality may put them at an increased risk

of verbal and physical violence from both family and peers (Howard & Nicholas 1999). Martin and Hetrick (1998) report that half of the homophobic physical abuse experienced by young gay and lesbian people came from within their immediate family.

Literature Review

There is a scarcity of research dedicated to lgbt young people and their experiences of homelessness and access to housing in a Queensland context.

There are two core pieces of Australian research that explore young people's experiences in youth SAAP services. The 'foundation' piece of research was undertaken in Sydney in 1995 by Twenty 10 Association and is entitled *As Long As I've got My Doona: A report on Lesbian and Gay Youth Homelessness*.

The second was written by Perth Inner City Youth Service in 2003 and is entitled *Closets of SAAP: the experiences of young people with diverse sexuality and gender expression access to supported accommodation*. A central finding from this research which in turn largely inspired the *Opening the Door?* report was the finding that "over half of the service providers interviewed stated that they had rarely provided accommodation services to young people with diverse sexuality and gender expression" (PICYS 2003:8).

Homelessness in Queensland
Statistically it is very hard to demonstrate the total numbers of homeless young people in Queensland. The two main sources of data are from the SAAP National Data Collection Agency (NDCA) and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census, each having a different data counting method. The NDCA data is cumulative and is collected by services over the course of a financial year while the ABS Census is a 'point in time' data collection method and conducted once every five years. The data however does provide some indications of levels of homelessness and there has been an attempt to draw some of this information together by Chamberlain and MacKenzie (2004).

The 2001 census study found that the rate of homelessness in Queensland was 69.8 people per 10,000 or that about 1.4 per 200 Queenslanders are homeless on any given night. Queensland has the second highest rate of homelessness in the country and a very high rate of indigenous homelessness (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 2004).

The 2001 census study also found that nearly a quarter (24,569) of the homeless population (99,900) was living in Queensland. Only 9% of homeless people (using the cultural definition of homelessness) were accommodated in the SAAP service system on the census night (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 2004).

The NDCA data for 2003/04 found that there were 17,950 clients who utilised the SAAP service system providing a total of 28,350 support periods (1.58 support periods per client). The NDCA data for 2003/2004 also found that one in every two hundred people (10 years +) in Queensland are homeless (54/10,000) (AIHW 2004).

Young people and homelessness
Thirty-six percent of the homeless population in Queensland were young people aged 12 to 24 (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 2004). There were 6,100 young people that accessed the SAAP service system during the 2003/04 financial year. Most of these young people (86%) were single males and females.

Young people are amongst the most vulnerable in the homeless population. Causes of homelessness are multi-faceted and vary. The most fundamental cause of youth homelessness is a breakdown in family relationships. (AFHO 2004b).

As it is not the consideration of this report to look at why young people become homeless, and was indeed a conscious decision of the project team *not* to ask young people to disclose these reasons, primary importance is then placed on the issue of lgbt young people and their unique experiences in accessing SAAP services.

To this end, one researcher at least has commented, that "there is an increased risk of homelessness for lgbt young people **without** any other contributing factors" (MacKenzie 2003:2).

lgbt young people and homelessness
In 1995 it was estimated that one in four young homeless people were gay or lesbian (Irwin, Winter, Gregoric & Watts). A further study undertaken by La Trobe University in 2003 found that 16% of Melbourne's homeless young people identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual and that this data indicated that young same sex attracted/both sex attracted people are "…over represented among the homeless population" (Rossiter, Mallet, Myers & Rosenthal 2003:24).

Statistics such as these are supported by international research. Research undertaken in the United States in 1995 estimated that a staggering 40-50% of the homeless population in New York are lgbt young people (Buchanan 1995). A Texan study in 2001 reported that 36% of homeless young people identified as lgbt (Rew, Taylor-Seehafer, Thomas & Yockey).

The literature review identified a number of common themes to lgbt homelessness. These themes relate not so much to the specific barriers to housing, but more to the *issues and contributing factors* to homelessness and risk of homelessness for lgbt young people and are as follows:

- lgbt young people leave home more frequently than other young people. In the large part this is due to the rejection from families because of their sexuality (Hillier et al 1998);
- lgbt young people represent a disproportionate number of homeless young people when compared to the overall population (Hillier et al 1998; Buchanan 1995);
- lgbt young homeless people are subject to violence/harassment/discrimination as key elements of their experience (PICYS 2003; Cochran, Stewart, Ginzler & Cauce 2002; Riley 2003; Irwin et al 1995);
- lgbt young people have higher rates of drug use than other young people in general (PICYS 2003; Hillier et al 1998; Cochran et al 2002; Irwin et al 1995);

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- lgbt young people have poor access or a lack of access to quality and appropriate sexuality education/information (Hillier et al 1998; PICYS 2003);
- lgbt young homeless people often had histories of emotional, physical or sexual abuse (PICYS 2003; Rew et al 2001; Talbot n.d);
- lgbt young people who experience homophobia in schools can become disconnected from education (Irwin et al 1995; Hillier et al 1998; MacKenzie 2003);
- lgbt young homeless people were more likely to use sex work to survive economically (PICYS 2003; Buchanan 1995; Irwin et al 1995);
- lgbt young people have increased rates of suicidality (PICYS 2003; Rew 2001; Brown 2002).

lgbt young people and their experiences of SAAP services
According to an inquiry undertaken by the NSW Ombudsman into SAAP (2004:8), the program is intended to be:

- delivered free of discrimination within a framework of human and consumer rights and respect for individuals;
- accessible and inclusive of people with a wide range of needs and circumstances, including people with complex needs or requiring a high level of service response;
- flexible and responsive to individual needs; and
- coordinated and collaborative in its approach to meeting clients' needs and working with other service systems.

In a SAAP context, young lgbt people are confronted with a myriad of issues that compound their already difficult circumstances. Significant numbers of lgbt young people experience discrimination, violence and harassment in SAAP services (AIDS Council of New South Wales 2004; PICYS 2003).

In *Closets of SAAP,* the experiences of young lgbt people in SAAP services was characterised by:

- fear;
- homophobia;
- barriers that result in young people 'sleeping rough'; and
- inadequate support from workers
    - Inability to address homophobia
    - Lack of awareness/strategies to address sexual health
    - Lack of sensitivity.

Personal safety is of paramount concern to lgbt young people in SAAP services and the literature has identified that lgbt young people will choose to sleep rough rather than within a SAAP setting (Irwin et al 1995).

An American study revealed that housing has been identified by transgender people as one of their three most significant issues (Mottet & Ohle 2003). SAAP building infrastructure for young lgbt people can be inadequate and inappropriate by virtue of

design.   Transgender young people in particular bear the brunt of this lack of foresight. Transgender young people face unique difficulties and as Riley suggests, refuge/crisis accommodation is the most difficult area for transgender people of any age (2003). Transgender clients may find that mainstream services are not capable of addressing their needs and it was one of the recommendations within the *Closets of SAAP* report that the establishment of youth SAAP services specifically for young people with diverse sexuality and gender expression be established as part of addressing these problems.

Methodology

Figure 2: Project Methodology

LITERATURE REVIEW

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SAAP Services Questionnaire
The first part of the data collection involved a questionnaire mail-out to all youth-specific SAAP funded services in Queensland *<Appendix 2>*. Informally, the project was also discussed at a QYHC-resourced network meeting - the Accommodation Coordinators Network (ACN) and a proto-type of the questionnaire was disseminated for feedback.

This part of the research was deliberately undertaken first. The responses and information received from services informed the basis of the questions asked of young people during the semi-structured interview process.

A total of sixty-nine services received the questionnaire – either through the mail-out process or via the ACN network meeting. Questionnaires sent out as part of the mail-out process received a project cover letter *<Appendix 1>* and a stamped, addressed envelope for return of completed questionnaires to QYHC. Services who received the questionnaire at the ACN meeting were briefed by a project Reference Group member and also given the cover-letter and return stamped envelope. A mail-out was chosen as the method of questionnaire dissemination due to being the most cost-effective for state-wide data collection and time effective for a project team comprised of only two part-time staff.

An initial questionnaire was designed and critiqued by key Reference Group members. As a result of this review and early data collected, the questionnaire format was changed slightly to refine one particular question. Question 10 originally asked "*Can you identify any practices from other youth housing providers that either assist with lgbt young people's access or provide barriers to housing*". This question was subsequently refined and broken into two separate questions relating to a) practices that assist and b) practices that create barriers.

The timeframe for return of the questionnaires was flexible and collation and analysis of the data only began once they had ceased coming back. No questionnaires were received after collation had begun and therefore no valuable data was lost.

Twenty-three services participated, representing a response rate of 33%. Had the resources allowed, the project team would have liked to initiate follow-up processes with those services who did not respond.

Once all responses were received, collation was undertaken by the project team and a volunteer. The process was two-fold. The initial collation was fundamentally calculating the basics of response rates. Due to the largely qualitative nature of data, no computer data analysis tools were required. Secondary and more thorough collation involved the identification of the data into various theme sets. These theme sets were then used in the development of the interview questions for young people.

lgbt Young People Interviews
The experiences of lgbt young people were sought through participation in a semi-structured interview.

Several members of the Reference Group met and devised themes relevant to the research project goals. The themes guided the development of specific questions and were also compared to the themes that had informed the service provider questionnaires. The project team also reviewed the question schedules of other research projects with lgbt young people who were homeless or at risk of homelessness. The expertise of Reference Group members who worked in youth SAAP services was sought to review and improve the questions for the interviews. Several young people were also informally consulted during the question formulation stage and their feedback was incorporated.

Ten young people were interviewed using a semi-structured interview *<Appendix 3>*. Nine of the young people who participated in the research were contacted through Open Doors, and the other participant was contacted through a SAAP service who had participated on the project Reference Group. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed in order to use verbatim quotes within the research report. Each interview took approximately 50 minutes with the longest being 1.5 hours, and the shortest being 30 minutes.

Verbal and written information was provided by the interviewer to the young people to gain consent for their participation in the research project. *<Appendix 4>*. Issues of confidentiality were considered extremely important as several young people were still within SAAP services at the time. Participants were provided with a written draft, showing the context their information was used in. All participants consented to participate in the project.

Research Limitations and Implications
Open Doors and Queensland Youth Housing Coalition have a commitment to explore and develop responses to lgbt young people who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness. This research has been significant to begin the exploration and documentation of these issues within a Queensland context. However there are a number of limitations of the scope of the research.

Service Provider Data
▪ Participation rates were affected (although not significantly) by the questionnaire mail-out methodology.
▪ Anonymous responses were inclined to be less detailed than those who identified themselves.
▪ Identified 'hard to reach' services were unable to be personally met with and encouraged to participate due to time and resource constraints.
▪ The 'hidden population' nature of lgbt young people meant that some services either were unable to estimate the number of people they had supported/housed or led to the belief that they had not provided support to any lgbt young people.

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- Respondents were asked to estimate how many of each group (lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender) they had housed or supported within the last year. What would have been useful in addition to this estimate would have been that number expressed as a percentage of total clients for the year.
- Questions that were intended to be about general practice issues were sometimes perceived by the respondents to be only about their service specifically. Hence when seeking information about the knowledge of practice examples for working with young lgbt people, many services only answered with regard to their own practices and not any others that they had knowledge of.
- One question required further clarification and was broken into two separate questions after initial questionnaire dissemination. Responses to this question prior to amendment therefore may have been subject to ambiguity or misunderstanding.

lgbt Young People Data
- The majority of the young people that were interviewed had accessed youth housing services only within the greater Brisbane area. One young person had accessed services in Far North Queensland and another young person had accessed services in the Sunshine Coast area and Melbourne.
- The transgender young people known to the project team were unable to participate during the time that interviews were being conducted. It is acknowledged that there are homeless and young transgender people at risk of homelessness currently in Brisbane.
- A question was included in the interviews with lesbian, gay, bisexual and same-sex attracted young people of their perceptions of the experiences of transgender young people within a SAAP setting. This was included to gather some information of these young people's experiences; however it is acknowledged that this is no substitute for the direct participation of transgender young people.
- Two of the young people interviewed were from culturally diverse backgrounds. It was however outside the scope of this research to explore any relationship between cultural diversity, sexuality and gender identity and young people's experiences of homelessness and accessing SAAP services.

Research Findings - Service Providers

Service Provider Findings – Snapshot
- 23 respondents from youth SAAP services in Queensland.
- 22% of services do not or have not provided housing to lgbt young people.
- 80% of the services who have not provided housing to lgbt young people stated that lgbt young people do not "identify" themselves to services.
- 63% of services cited peer acceptance, discrimination or homophobia as challenges to housing lgbt young people.
- 43% of services could not identify specific practices that assist with lgbt young people's access to housing.
- 74% of services would attend training about supporting lgbt young people in housing.
- 19% of services stated that homophobia was not an issue within their organisation.
- 30% of services do not have access & equity or diversity policy statements that specifically include lgbt young people.

Disclosure of service name
70% of services identified themselves and 30% submitted anonymous responses.

Provision of SAAP housing to lgbt young people.
78% of services stated that they presently provided housing to lgbt young people, or had done so in the past. 22% of services stated that they did not or have not provided housing to young people who identified as lgbt.

Issues that affect lgbt young people in SAAP services
All respondents (78% of total) who indicated that they do or have in the past provided housing to lgbt young people also gave their response to this question.

One respondent indicated that there were no differences between housing this group of young people and any other group of young people.

> "…nothing comes to mind that is any different from other young people requiring emergency housing"

It was also mentioned that the same general issues that affect all young people were relevant also to lgbt young people.

> "…mainly homelessness which is why they are in a shelter"

Briefly, these issues include:

- Lack of housing stock;
- Lack of housing choice;
- Inadequate income support;

- Poor access to employment and training;
- Discrimination in the private rental market;
- Conflict with family; and
- Low self-esteem.

Other issues affecting lgbt young people included:
- Understanding their own sexuality/gender identity
  "…confusion over sexuality"
  "…lack of understanding of self"

- 'Coming out' processes

- Lack of appropriate resources and understanding within specific communities
  "…community acceptance is an issue"
  "…lack of appropriate housing for same-sex attracted couples"
  "…(lack of) adequate resource material and networks in the community"
  "…lack of lgbt specific support agencies, especially for young people under 18 years"

- Lack of lgbt specific mentors and networks within specific communities
  "…role models/mentors who can help them navigate through the difficulties of adolescence"

- Homophobia, intolerance and discrimination by peers
  "…prejudice from peers and homophobia"
  "…lack of understanding around their sexuality by their peers"
  "…tolerance of those sharing the accommodation…"

Reasons for not providing housing to lgbt young people
One service commented that although they were SAAP funded, they did not provide housing, but instead provide outreach services. Another reason given was that lgbt young people did not "refer themselves" to the service. Of the 22% of respondents who did not or had not provided housing to lgbt young people, 80% of services stated that none of the young people in the services 'identified' as lgbt. Services further elaborated on this point by stating;

> "…generally this is not an easy area for lgbt people, young or otherwise…"

> "…we live in a small rural community where people don't readily identify with these groups…"

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Opening the Door?
Exploratory research into lgbt young people's access to supported accommodation in Queensland

Number of lgbt people housed

This area of the questionnaire was designed to elicit some understanding of the number of lgbt young people who have been supported by Queensland SAAP services. Response numbers varied dramatically and it is stressed that the question asked services to *estimate* the numbers of lgbt young people they had supported. Responses to this question indicate the presence of larger themes such as the issue of disclosure and identification by young people. It is not purported that these figures act as an authoritative indication of the number of lgbt young people housed as the research explored *the experiences* of service providers and young lgbt people and not the volume.

Figure 3: Estimated Number of lgbt People Housed

AGENCY ID#	Number of same sex	Number of bisexual	Number of transgender	Total
1	No response	No response	No response	-
2	5	3	0	8
3	"No data"	"No data"	"No data"	-
4	2	4	"N/A"	6
5	0	0	0	-
6	1	1	0	2
7	0	0	0	-
8	4	15	"Nil known"	19
9	No response	No response	No response	-
10	0	0	0	-
11	6	2	1	9
12	1 couple + several singles	"Unknown"	0	~6
13	No response	No response	No response	-
14	~20	~60	2	~82
15	~6	"Unknown"	-	~6
16	1	1	0	2
17	~10	"N/A"	3	~13
18	4	"Unknown"	0	4
19	2 couples with kids	0	0	2
20	3	1	1	5
21	No response	"Unknown"	"Unknown"	-
22	"Less than 5"	"Less than 10"	1	~ 15
23	"Unknown"	"Unknown"	"Unknown"	-
TOTALS	~ 75	~ 97	~8	

~ represents "approximately".

Challenges in housing lgbt young people

All services, with the exception of one, responded (most in detail) to this question. The responses can be grouped according to the themes below. The strongest response was around the issue of peer acceptance, with 63% of respondents citing issues of peer acceptance, discrimination or homophobia as a challenge to housing young lgbt people in their services. One service expressed the opposite concern for tenants, suggesting that the presence of a same-sex attracted young person in their service "…can make other young women in shelter feel uncomfortable". Another

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service positively responded with the fact that they have faced no significant challenges to housing lgbt young people.

Other themes suggested as challenges to housing lgbt young people in SAAP services were;

- Acceptance from peers/homophobia
  "…dealing with the homophobia/prejidice of peers"
  "…persecution from other young people"
  "…discrimination from other residents…threats of harm"

- Balancing the needs of transgender young people with service capacity
  "…appropriateness of women only housing for transgender young people"

- Impact of community culture/attitudes
  "…we as an agency would have no issues or problems but being a small rural community, issues may arise from community members who have little understanding and/or tolerance"

  "…the challenges would come from the broader environment. There is a dominant 'macho', white conservative culture in this area"

- Education of young people regarding diverse sexuality/gender identity
  "…increased amount of time discussing sexual identity issues and addressing homophobia with clients"

- Young people not self-identifying
  "…no lgbt have identified themselves to us. As we do not discriminate in our organisation I would not expect any great challenges to present themselves"

- Linking the young people with relevant and appropriate support services
  "…linking with relevant & appropriate support services"

Approaches used to meet the challenges of housing lgbt young people
Only one service did not respond to this question. The most prominent theme received in response to the question was that of education – the strategy of educating both the young people and the service staff around non-discriminatory and non-prejudicial behaviour. With this question there was once again the recurrent response of "using the same approach" with all young people. It is unclear whether these types of responses are in fact positive and indicate an inclusive and holistic housing "best practice" framework for young people or are negative and imply a lack of understanding of the complex and diverse needs of homeless/at risk lgbt young people. Responses to this question can be grouped according to the following themes;

- Educate and challenge young people about sexuality and gender identity
  "…challenge prejudices and model appropriate behaviours to young people"
  "…challenge young peoples discriminatory beliefs through appropriate education"

- Educate, challenge and develop networks for staff
  "…networking and resourcing workers"
  "…education of staff & clients of services through posters, fliers (sic), discussions"

- Being aware of the support required by lgbt young people or in addressing homophobia and prejudice
  "…tap into support networks within area to assist with supporting y.p (young people) and & services to them"

- Employment of strategies consistent with best practice with young people, i.e. respect, rights.
  "…ensuring policies, procedures and residential agreements are adhered to"
  "…house rules also include discrimination of any kind will not be tolerated and may result in termination of tenancy"

Practices that assist with lgbt young people's access to housing
43% of services either did not respond to this question or wrote "No' in the space provided. The response rate and types of responses to this question are particularly pertinent to the core reason for undertaking this research.

Due to an initial anomaly in questionnaire design (see Methodology page 21), this question was at first presented in two different formats. Fortunately, only four services received the questionnaire in the first format and of those four services, two still responded to the question, therefore it could not simply be that the question was misunderstood. It can be surmised from these responses then that; those practices that can assist lgbt young people's access to housing are not known; a dearth of practices exist; or it is considered that no barriers actually do exist.

Of the 57% of services that responded to this question, the following themes were identified as assisting lgbt young people's access to housing:
- Employing non-judgemental and respectful work practices
- Having strong organizational policy and procedure guidelines regarding best practice
- Ensuring appropriate and relevant linking with support services

Some of the comments from services included:

"all young people regardless of race, religious beliefs, gender, sexuality etc will be treated with dignity and respect"

"non-judgemental attitudes and openness…identify housing need and housing options"

"policy on anti-discrimination operational within organisation…normalisation of sexual preferences through staff acceptance"

One service stated that "lgb could easily access housing as like anyone else". Another unique response was "…can't say I'm aware of anyone doing anything that's cutting edge or visionary".

Practices that create barriers to housing for lgbt young people
70% of participants gave a response to this question. These responses ranged from short one-word answers to many lines. The ways services interpreted this question (as with many others) was that it was a reference only to practices *within their own service*. Therefore some of the responses to this question included;

> "…not in this organisation"

> "…we predominantly house families"

> "None. We have a child protection policy and follow this"

The majority of respondents indicated that discrimination and homophobia (whether institutional or peer-based) were the most significant barriers.

Perceived or actual discriminatory behaviour was linked also to the presence of judgemental attitudes of staff and/or other young people.

Peer discrimination –

> "…the negative stuff from other young people that workers might not hear"

Institutional discrimination –

> "I worry about church based organisations –but am uncertain of any specific practices".

Other themes identified by services included:
- The invisibility of lgbt young people, or services making assumptions about young people's sexuality;
- The non-acceptance of male to female transgender clients in women's housing services;
- The fact that no lgbt-specific SAAP services exist in Queensland; and
- Inappropriate support and/or placement of lgbt young people.

Would services attend training about supporting lgbt young people in housing?

Yes | 74%
No | 18%
Maybe | 4 %
Blank | 4%
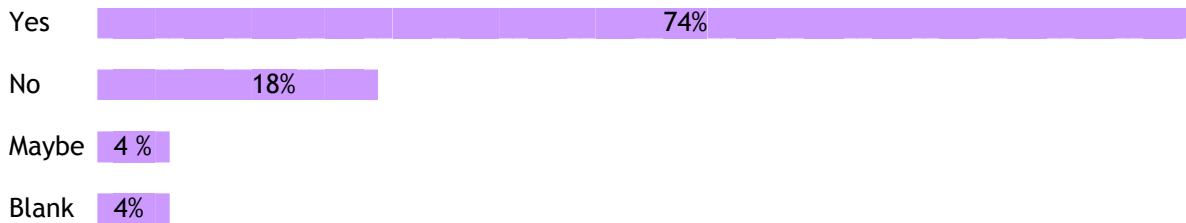
Would it be useful, in resources of training forums, to hear experiences of young lgbt people?

Yes | 91%
No | 9%
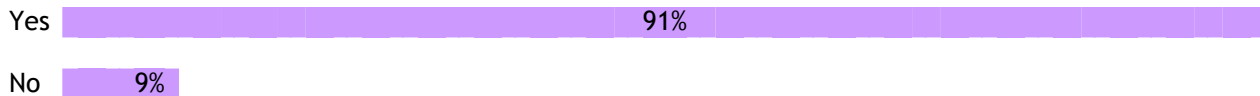
Organisational responses to homophobia

91% of participants responded to this question. Some respondents addressed the question in general terms, reflecting their responses to homophobic attitudes that were staff based *and* client based, whilst others addressed the occurrence of only one site of homophobia. 19% of services stated that homophobia was not an issue within their organisation, with regard to staff attitudes. Half of this percentage of services went on to clarify that although the problem may not exist within staffing, it has existed at one time or another within their clients.

A number of services expressed a "zero tolerance" (their words) approach to homophobia within their organisations. Themes of other responses given by services included;

- Challenging and discussing displays of homophobia by young people
  "…with education & modelling of accepting behaviour"

- Employing best practice strategies – social justice, respect and equality etc.
  "…we work from a social justice framework. If people have an issue re lgbt we discuss rights of individuals"

- Employing inclusive and proactive policies and procedures
  "…as with any other form of discrimination, through policy, procedure, legal parameters…"

- Educating and providing information to young people
  "…through education, discussion and challenging behaviours…"

Do organisations have access and equity or diversity policy statements that include lgbt young people?

Yes	52%
No	30%
Maybe	9%
Blank	9%
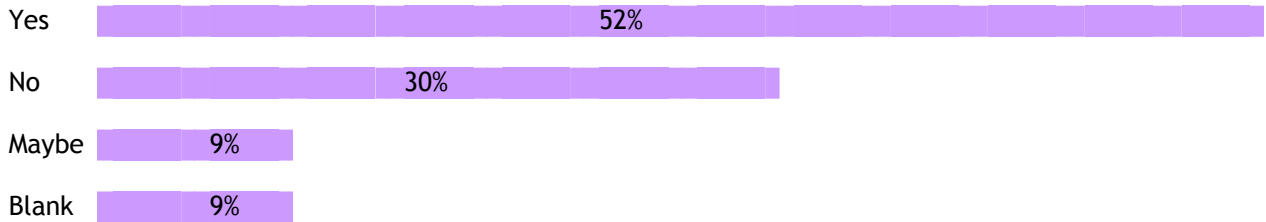
As part of this question, services were also asked to provide comments relating to their responses. Of the 91% who gave a response, almost 40% gave some commentary to further explain their response.

Responses to this question varied according to how the question was interpreted by services. For instance, one service ticked "No" and then qualified this response with "(we)…have policy relating to equity for all without listing any particular minority groups". Similarly another service who ticked "No" wrote "our policy states that all people will be treated as equal".
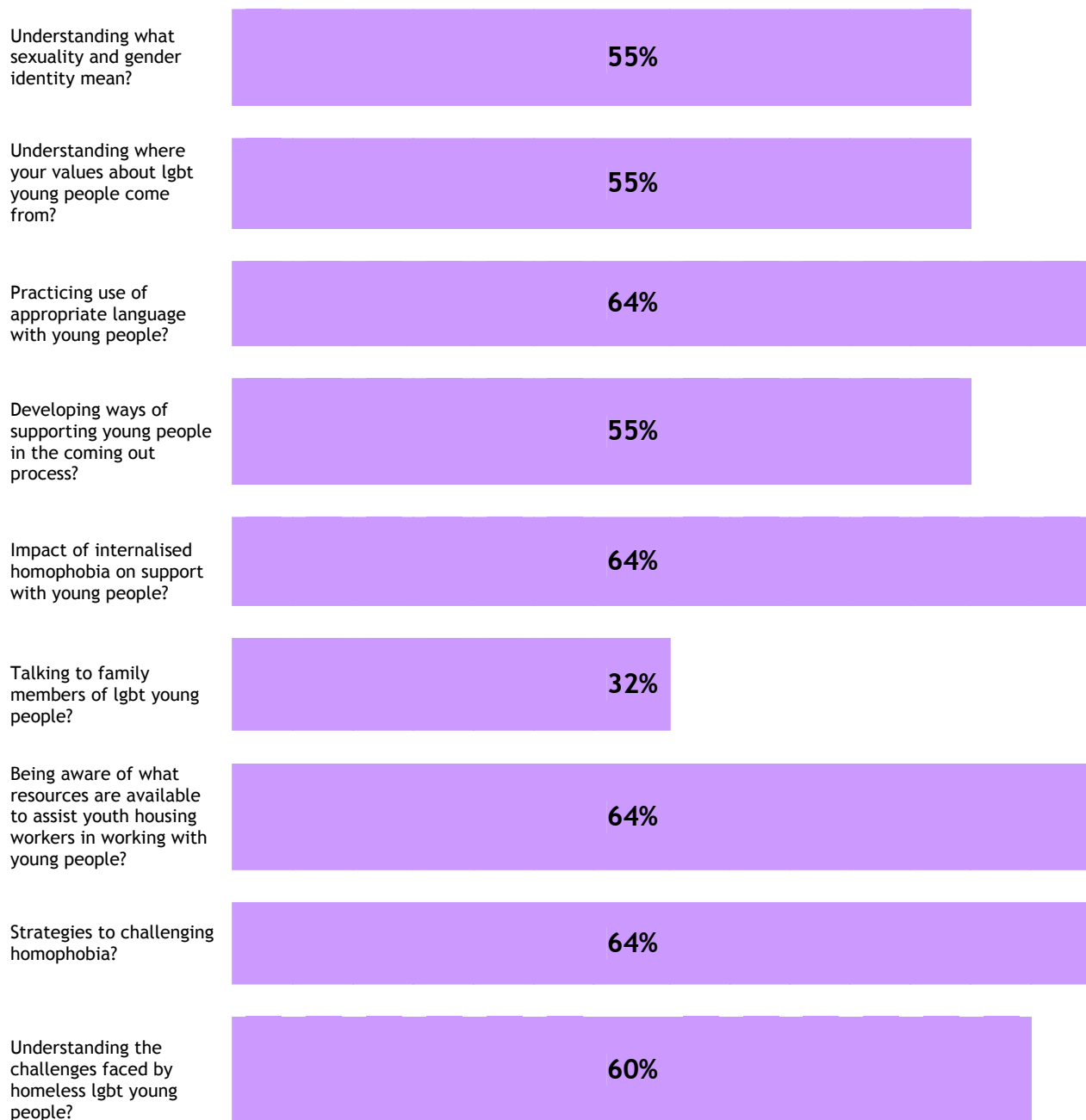
Some of the other comments included by services as part of their responses to this question were;

"…general policies are in place, lgbt not specifically mentioned"

"…our policy states that the organisation does not tolerate discrimination of any kind, but does not specify lgbt as such…"

Responses to training forum topics

74% of respondents indicated that they would attend training relevant to supporting lgbt young people in housing. From this number, the topics below are displayed according to the percentage of respondents who considered each topic "Very Relevant" in a training forum.

Topic	Percentage
Understanding what sexuality and gender identity mean?	55%
Understanding where your values about lgbt young people come from?	55%
Practicing use of appropriate language with young people?	64%
Developing ways of supporting young people in the coming out process?	55%
Impact of internalised homophobia on support with young people?	64%
Talking to family members of lgbt young people?	32%
Being aware of what resources are available to assist youth housing workers in working with young people?	64%
Strategies to challenging homophobia?	64%
Understanding the challenges faced by homeless lgbt young people?	60%

Suggestions for other topics to be included in a training forum
Almost 22% of services responded with suggestions for alternative training topics. One service in particular commented that the topics already suggested *"…provide a wide choice (and are) the most relevant to our service re training and information needed to provide support to lgbt clients"*.

Other suggested training topics included;

"Practices for working with and housing, transgender young people in women only housing"

"Legal impact on minors who identify as lgbt"

"lgbt specific health issues"

"Information on cross-dressing/drag (and)…transgender young people's experiences…"

The information service providers would find most helpful to learn about from young lgbt people who have had experiences in SAAP.
78% of services responded to this question. One service simply stated *"yp (young people) involvement paramount"*. Other responses could be broken down into four main themes:

- What were lgbt young people's experiences of SAAP?
- Are there improvements that could be made to service delivery?
- What was helpful?
- What was not helpful?

Research Findings – lgbt Young People

lgbt Young People Findings – Snapshot
- Ten respondents – four females and six males.
- The average age of respondents was 17 years, with the range being 15-21 years.
- Identity disclosure within SAAP services is a particularly complex issue. Personal safety, lack of privacy and assessing the likelihood of acceptance impact significantly on an lgbt young person's decision to disclose their sexuality and/or gender identity.
- Young people do experience homophobia within SAAP services. This homophobia manifests differently for young lgbt people. Young men experience threats and actual physical violence, whereas young women experience sexual harassment and intimidation.
- lgbt young people valued SAAP services that were explicit in their efforts to recognise their needs and to value them as lgbt young people.
- Inclusive practices identified by lgbt young people:
  - Naming lgbt young people as a target group within promotional or intake processes;
  - Challenging homophobia from other young people in SAAP services;
  - The presence of 'out' youth workers;
  - Linking and referral to appropriate lgbt community resources.
- Exclusive practices identified by lgbt young people:
  - Organisational homophobia;
  - Being treated less favourably then other young people;
  - Explicitly critical comments (by staff or other young people) about sexuality or gender identity.

Figure 4: Participant Age & Gender

GENDER	AGE			
	15	**17**	**18**	**21**
Female	1	2	-	1
Male	2	1	3	-

Figure 5: Number of SAAP facilities Accessed by Region

RESPONDENT ID#	Total Number of Services & Regions				
1	**1** Inner Brisbane	**1** North Qld			
2	**1** Outer Brisbane				
3	**8** all Greater Brisbane				
4	**1** Inner Brisbane				
5	**4** Greater Brisbane		**1** Sunshine Coast	**1** Sydney	**2** Melbourne
6	**2** Inner Brisbane				
7	**1** Inner Brisbane				
8	**1** Inner Brisbane	**1** Outer Brisbane			
9	**3** Greater Brisbane				
10	**7** Greater Brisbane				

Factors that impact on young people's decision making regarding disclosure

All the young people who participated in the interviews explained that whether or not to disclose their sexuality or gender identity was a particularly complex issue. Young people are exploring their identity at a time when they are also vulnerable due to their housing and support needs.

When you go into a shelter, you're like, should I tell them? Should I be open about being gay or should I not be? <I/V #5>

▪ **Assessing people's lgbt friendliness**

Young people described the skills they had developed in gathering information that assists with their decision making about whether to disclose their sexuality to others in a SAAP setting.

There can be a fear of not really being accepted I guess so you've got to be careful but I guess it's just sussing out the person and working out if they're open. <I/V #6>

It would depend on how I felt with the young people. You just watch them and you drop subtle hints. You just see how they handle it. Like you talk about somebody who is gay and see how they react. <I/V #3>

- **No disclosure for safety and acceptance**

Some young people assessed that disclosure would be harmful to them and indicated that numbers of lgbt young people remain invisible within SAAP services.

They kept asking me 'How many girls have you done?' I'm like... umm 'plenty' cause I didn't want to let them know because they were pretty tough. <I/V #7>

There are a lot of people out there who you just don't know because they are so scared to come out because they will be bashed. <I/V #1>

Because usually, in my experience if I've told people, it does fracture a friendship or a relationship. <I/V #8>

The lack of privacy within the youth SAAP sector was identified as a significant factor affecting decision making regarding disclosure.

Crisis youth shelters become one small homeless young people family- that's a good and a bad thing. You mightn't have even met people and they will know you from the shelters and that other young people have talked about you. If you are transgender then maybe you don't want to tell people. In crisis accommodation no, maybe in longer term yes. <I/ V #3>

- **Pride in disclosure**

Young people, who did disclose their sexuality or gender identity, described the experience with a sense of pride at having overcome numerous barriers.

I moved in when 15 years old and was sorting through the 'coming out stuff'. I used to say I was bi back then, and I got more confidence living with (a same-sex couple) to actually come out and tell everyone and tell my mum and stuff. <I/V #4>

I'm fully gay and proud of it! <I/V #5>

Everyone knew. Its part of me - if they don't like it they can pretty much f**k off. <I/V #9>

- **Positive responses to disclosure**

Young people who did disclose their identity to others within SAAP described the effect that it sometimes had on other young people.

There would be heaps of people hiding their sexuality. After a few hours people would be "Shhhh I'm bisexual", they are like "can you keep it secret?" Half the house comes out to me! <I/V #5>

There were also self-esteem benefits for young people when their sexuality was accepted by others.

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The other side of it was that there were a bunch of kids that just loved it, they weren't gay but they just loved the fact that I was gay because they'd never really met one before…It was really good for me because I was still being and going through all this stuff – oh my God its not a problem, I can just say that I'm gay! <I/V #3>

Makes you a stronger person after a while teaching- showing heaps of people that gay people aren't so bad. <I/V #5>

lgbt young people's experiences of homophobia from other young people
Several young people had either directly experienced or had witnessed other young people be threatened or assaulted because of their actual or perceived sexuality and gender identity. These young people asserted this was an expression of homophobia.

- **Young men's experiences of homophobia**

I know of people, definitely who get shit for just looking gay... hell yeah in youth shelters with boys definitely. Specifically if they're girlier boys, not to be offensive I don't really know how to explain it, not real homeys or anything like that. I've seen them get hard core picked on and bashed and stuff. <I/V #10>

I said I can barely hear it (the TV) and he said, are you trying to be a smart arse? and he grabbed me by my shirt and was going to hit me. And then when he left he was 'typical effing fag' <I/V #1>

I've seen other boys hold boys back as soon a gay guy walks in the door…he just got up and was like 'you f***ing fag' and started running towards to him hard core... He had only seen him for two seconds- he had only walked in the door. Just because of the way he looked. He wouldn't have even known if he was gay. <I/V #10>

I'm going to sound really discriminatory here, but sometimes the young straight males can be really aggressive if they're using drugs. <I/V #3>

- **Young women's experience of homophobia**
The expressions of homophobia appear to manifest differently for young men and young women. Young men experience threats and actual physical violence, whereas the common experience for young women appears to be based on sexual harassment and sexual intimidation.

The guys got a bit excited …. Yeah because of the sexuality thing, having a lesbian in the house <I/V #10>

Where I was staying there were two girls both bisexual leaning toward homosexuality- I met them. They were quite out. Since they were female I think

the guys liked it. You know, fantasy stuff, it's the social construction stuff. <I/V #8>

- **Perceptions of young transgender people's experiences**

Several of the young people interviewed had been in SAAP services with transgender young people. There was an awareness of the difficulties they faced, not just with accessing accommodation but in many areas of public life.

Well basically some people belittle them and see it as people who cannot decide what their gender identity is so therefore they aren't significant to society. <I/V #8>

She has copped a lot of crap. Like walking down the street is a whole issue for them. <I/V #6>

I've only met one transgender person in accommodation and she was very remarkable. She really kind of taught me a lot about what transgender people are like. I used to think they were just boys in dresses. It takes a lot of strain on them (sic). <I/V #5>

And I knew she had different issues but I don't know exactly what kind. I think just being paid out lots and I think she was bashed up before …They kind of get even weirder stares then what we get... there's like the gay stare and then there's the transgender stare… <I/V #10>

Organisational procedures inclusive of lgbt young people

Several young people had accessed SAAP services that were intentionally inclusive and made efforts to recognise and respond to their needs according to sexual and gender identity.

- **Explicit recognition of lgbt issues in intake process**

Young people valued organisations that explicitly recognized that lgbt young people can experience issues differently to their heterosexual peers.

On intake being clear. So at the end of the interview they would say this is a place for all young people and we don't discriminate and if you have any problems come and talk about it and we can sort it and it should all be OK. <I/V #3>

- **Explicit recognition of lgbt young people in service promotional material**

An obvious organisational procedure that communicated the agency had considered the needs of lgbt young people, was the inclusion in the service material that is distributed to young people and the youth sector.

They had it on the pamphlet! <I/V #9>

- **lgbt friendly workplace**

Organisations that embody equal employment processes and support their staff, who chose, to be appropriately open with their sexuality with young people, were highly valued by lgbt young people. Several young people talked about the enormous value of knowing a worker who publicly identified their sexuality or was 'out'.

One shelter had an out worker, she was really great. All the residents could rely on her. She was a really funky worker. <I/V #5>

Good youth work practices supportive of lgbt young people

Five of the young people interviewed had experienced youth work practices that they identified as supportive of their sexuality.

- **Valuing lgbt young people**

We were cool with them (the workers), they were cool with us being gay, and we all got along really well. <I/V #4>

Them just accepting me for who I am and not like treating me differently while living there. They just treated me as though I was a normal person. Every person is normal no matter what is their sexuality. <I/V #9>

- **Challenging homophobia from other young people**

When other residents are using homophobic language (see) the workers would intervene and tell people to not be so vindictive with the language. <I/V #8>

- **Value of 'out' youth workers as role models**

Youth workers who were public with their sexuality were seen to be positive role models to both young people and to have an educative role with other staff within SAAP services.

It was good having an 'out' worker (at one of the shelters') as it made it easier for the other staff to be comfortable. <I/V #3>

The differences between young people who had experienced contact with a diversity of lgbt people, and those who had only superficially met lgbt adults was marked. The benefits for a young person's sense of identity and future can be easily identified.

I don't know many gay guys who have a really good career, have a happy home life. That's probably another reason why I don't want to identify as being gay. I can't imagine ... in 50 years time being a 70 year old gay guy… <I/V #2>

- **Linking young people to appropriate lgbt community resources**

Young lgbt people spoke very highly of SAAP services with workers that were aware of lgbt community resources because it assisted to reduce the young person's social isolation.

They helped me find... like other people - I didn't know anyone who was gay- like I knew Ellen (Ellen DeGeneres- 'out' American lesbian comedian) that was the only gay person I knew! <I/V#10>

Organisational and youth work practices that exclude lgbt young people

Young people had accessed particular SAAP services and were able to identify practices that were exclusionary of them and of their sexuality or gender identity. Frequently the young people felt extremely angry and upset by the treatment they had received.

- **Organisational homophobia**

At another shelter they were saying that they don't like dykes and being really sort of angry. It was both the young people and the workers. So I just kept my mouth shut. They made jokes about it all the time, about gay people. It was homophobic but they didn't quite say to you -'don't come back'. <I/V #3>

- **Treated less favourably then other young people**

The attitudes of some SAAP services resulted in young people feeling they would not have the same access to the services on offer as other young people.

Went to one place to get information about accommodation and my initial reaction was that I would never last. I just had that instinct.....As soon as I walked in there they all just sort of stopped and looked; feeling really uncomfortable. They were looking at me because they're not used to it (seeing a gay man) and they've sort of had a rough life.... They (the workers) sort of looked at me a bit weird, and like 'what do you want?' There was no one who was even remotely relating to me. <I/V #1>

This was a Christian youth shelter and that made it really hard and I had to try and fit into the Christian lifestyle to get the Christian long-term house. So I kind of became a not lesbian or a not bisexual! <I/V #10>

- **Explicitly critical comments about sexuality or gender identity**

Several young people who were interviewed had experienced highly negative comments from youth workers or other people who came to provide services within SAAP settings.

I don't know how many Bible verses you get thrown at you...just like continually arguing with me to the point that I'd be in tears, like every single time I saw

them…I was sinning I was evil. Like they weren't being nice about it that's for sure. It was all a phase I was going to grow out of it. They were definitely sure. <I/V #10>

The way you are is not the right way; you are sinning every time you do an act in your people's way. It's a sin. This is someone who is supposed to be helping homeless people and she's driving me into the freakin' ground. <I/V #1>

Experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender young people independent of sexuality or gender identity
The young people interviewed spoke of their experiences in accessing SAAP services. Many of their experiences are directly related to their sexual or gender identity. However, they also offered information that highlights issues that are relevant to any young person who is homeless or at risk of homelessness. The following sections outline these issues that are generally common to young people accessing SAAP services.

- **Organisational procedures that enhance feelings of safety**

House Guidelines regarding visitor limitation, return times and emergency procedures
lgbt young people identified that the existence of particular organisational guidelines and structures assisted them to feel safer with the organisation's approach to providing accommodation.

Main things that made it safe is that there were set guidelines. You had to be back by a certain time; nobody was allowed to visit at all, that sort of thing and the staff did enforce rules. <I/V #8>

Security – like not lgbt issues, but security in housing knowing that if emergencies do happen … that there is something in place. <I/V #10>

The workers being there was kind of safe as well because at that point I really didn't want to be found and that place seemed really tight about people not coming over and you don't know where it is until you phone and that was kind of important to me at that time. And kind of made me feel a bit better. <I/V #6>

Expectations of respectful behaviour
Young people said that organisational frameworks that outlined expectations of residents' behaviour, significantly increased feelings of personal safety.

They had this big rule book and it had this whole section on … you know you can't insult people in there, you can't be rude, you have to respect everyone. That was a big thing come to think of it. And so you get in trouble if you don't. They need a place to stay so they follow the rules. <I/V #6>

- **Good youth work practices that enhance feelings of safety**

In addition to the organisation's procedures and guidelines, young people spoke about the workers in SAAP services and what they did that made them feel welcome.

Relationship and trust building skills

If the workers' are nice. You can tell from the personality, if they're not too cranky and if they respect you. <I/V # 3>

Trust with housemates and workers and stuff like that. Just the people who are mainly there…. Trust is my biggest thing - you see we could live in a tent and as long as the people I was staying in the tent with I trusted, it wouldn't matter. <I/V #9>

Group facilitation skills

Getting the house more social. That is how the house got to be more accepting of gays. <I/V #5>

Youth centred practice

Sometimes I can get a bit defensive when people get intrusive – even if they are trying to help. If I want help I'll ask. <I/V # 2>

I know that when I was moving into (names accommodation service) that (worker) introduced me to (other young women) outside of the house so it wasn't my domain…. We found out a few things about each other in that conversation and yet that made me feel a lot better the next time I saw her. <I/V #10>

Managing diversity of young people

Youth work practice that allowed young people with varied backgrounds and beliefs to express themselves within a safe environment, was identified as being a supportive environment for lgbt young people.

At (one crisis shelter) everyone knew I was gay. There was one guy (resident young person) who was religious and I was gay! Everyone would just sit there and watch us debate back and forth. We'd be like hours and we'd be separated into separate rooms in the house and told not to talk to each other. Like we would go on, one time, from 9 in the morning til 9 at night! <I/V #3>

- **Unsupportive organisational and youth work practices**
Forced exit without referral or follow-up
Two of the young people interviewed for the research project had successfully maintained tenancy in a SAAP service for up to two years.

The other eight young people had experiences of a number of services that forced their exit from the SAAP services or provided them with reason to not engage with the service after a short period of time. It is acknowledged that homeless young people frequently have multiple and complex needs and that it is an unrealistic expectation for a SAAP service to be able to provide all of the required support. However, several young people told of their experience of being asked to leave a service without further assistance such as referral or follow-up.

One of them I got kicked out from because I was sick and they thought I was using. I wasn't, I was just really sick. I went back to the streets for a while. I was on the train, going back from (outer Brisbane suburb) and getting off the train at every stop and was vomiting. They said I had to go because I couldn't do the dishes. <I/V #3>

Kicked out. For using. And they thought they couldn't give me enough support because of my self-harming stuff. <I/V #10>

They weren't that helpful when you wanted information; they sort of just threw you pamphlets and that was it. Would prefer to be talked to rather then just being given pamphlets and told that I know what to do! That's not helping…<I/V #1>

- **Shortage of youth housing and youth housing options**

Lack of housing available
One of the pressures on the youth SAAP sector within Queensland is the shortage of appropriate available housing. lgbt young people spoke of this and their frustrations in not being able to access suitable long-term housing.

Get the waiting lists shorter. Build more houses and get the waiting lists shorter. I was waiting for 6 months and then I went out and got myself independent living and after I did that, a week later, I was pretty much put in this house. <I/V #9>

Limited exit options
The limited exit options that are available from crisis SAAP services was experienced by some young people.

I ran out of time. One place was trying to get me into … (name of long-term SAAP service) but I didn't get in. It was up to the last day. <I/V #3>

Limited range of housing and support models
In addition to lack of stock, young people also highlighted the lack of available housing and housing models to meet their diverse needs

The youth accommodation is not really me - I like to be more independent.
Them trying to be my parents trying to control me - (I) like an independent living environment. <I/V #9>

- **Additional factors that impact on feeling safe**

Sharing with strangers

A commonly reported experience of young people who had accessed SAAP services was the concern about sharing with other young people unknown to them.

Maybe the fact when I first moved into supported accommodation I was living with people I really don't know. But I guess it's me being a little bit judgemental but thinking, OK, who are these people? Like they've all got youth workers- did they do something, are they in trouble, criminals or something? <I/V #2>

At the shelter they kept saying that things were going missing. So I checked I counted. It was just too scary. <I/V #7>

Young women's experiences

Several of the young women identified that when accessing mixed SAAP services they felt uncomfortable and that their feelings of safety were compromised. The young women spoke about this as regularly occurring.

It's always… if there's a girl coming into the house -whether they're straight or gay, it's always the same, being checked out. <I/V #10>

Young women gave examples of the strategies they had developed to deal with the situation to try and keep themselves safe.

I left somewhere the same day because I didn't feel comfortable. I couldn't share the room. I didn't feel really comfortable there, I dunno, I rocked up, there were no other chicks there. I was the only girl and there were like five boys there who were pretty hard-core. <I/V #10>

I was always hanging out with the guys and it was a good thing cause if there was a dangerous guy who came into the house you had back up, if you needed to be protected. <I/V #3>

lgbt young people's recommendations regarding increasing access to SAAP

- Have an lgbt counsellor or worker who goes to the shelters.
- Have single rooms for privacy for transgender people.
- Educate other young people about transgender people.
- Support young people's exploration of sexual identity respecting their pace.

    Just let them talk, but don't be fully pushed on anything or each way and just being given different options. <I/V #4>

- Educate young people about diversity of sexuality and gender identity.
- Be aware of lgbt resources in the community and make referrals.
- State in intake processes that the organisation supports being non-discriminatory.

- Address other young people's use of homophobic comments.

  Workers don't have to do it all the time because that would just drive me insane! I know it's not really their job to do the counselling stuff but at the same time they can pick up on harsh comments and let people know that is not OK. That would help with feeling safer. <I/V #3>

- Have an lgbt specific youth shelter.
- Use visual resources.

  In some youth shelters, they have posters up everywhere. You could have posters of lgbt friendly stuff up, you actually feel more comfortable just staying there. It's just a poster, and it doesn't mean much but at the same time it tells you they know about it. <I/V #3>

- Use multiple strategies to communicate lgbt friendliness.

  And I think if there's a few different options of support, a few different things, its kind of got reinforcement for you to kind of believe the fact that is a safe place or   these people are safe people to talk to about this. It's not just one little thing… yeah   yeah 'we're gay friendly here's our little triangle here.' Like one little triangle in the   corner of the window, like seriously is not going to make me feel the safest.   Anything that is reinforced; to me that would make me feel better. They look like they are more prepared, they know more, they'd be more comfortable. <I/V #10>

- Examine organisational philosophy.

  I don't think it's the actual youth shelter itself but the actual organisation supporting it. Particularly if they've got religious interests in it, particularly like Christianity which does   sort of promote homophobia and homosexual vilification I just think that there should be some sort of governance around that as not all youth are straight or heterosexual and you will get occasionally the non-heterosexual there.

  I think that youth shelters should be more a government obligation rather then the charities of religious organisations that sort of thing. It's just that to promote more open mindedness, because if its public ground it's supposed to be neutral. <I/V #10>

- Have more housing for young people and provide cheaper housing.
- The government should do more research about homelessness to get more solutions to the problem.

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Appendices

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Dear Colleague,

QYHC and Open Doors Youth Service Inc have formed a partnership to seek information and to raise awareness of the housing and support needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (lgbt) young people, and those young people exploring their sexuality or gender identity.

The attached questionnaire is directed to youth housing and support agencies and will assist with the project development by seeking the experience of workers. The responses will be collated into a document that will assist with the development of resources and/or training for the sector.

If your service could take the time to fill out this short questionnaire, we would be most appreciative. Alternatively, if you would like to get involved in the Steering Group for this project or require more information, please do not hesitate to contact either Pauline or Elyse on the above numbers.

Please also find attached a stamped envelope for the return of the questionnaire to QYHC.

Kind Regards,

Elyse Maberley
Network & Development Officer
QYHC

Pauline Coffey
Sector Development Worker
Open Doors Inc

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Access to Housing for LGBT Young People Project

1. What is the name of your service? (optional) _____

2. Do you or have you in the past provided housing to young people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (lgbt)?

Yes ☐   No ☐
Go to Q3   Go to Q4

3. If yes, in your experience, what have been the issues affecting lgbt young people?

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4. If no, what reasons can you identify for your service not housing these groups of young people?

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Go to Q8

5. Please roughly estimate how many *same-sex* (gay/lesbian) attracted young people your service has housed or supported within the last year?

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6. Please roughly estimate how many *bisexual* young people your service has housed or supported within the last year?

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7. Please roughly estimate how many *transgender* young people your service has housed or supported within the last year?

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8. What challenges have you experienced, or would expect to experience in housing lgbt young people?

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9. What approaches do you/would you use to meet these challenges?

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10. Can you identify any practices that assist with lgbt young people's access to housing?

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11. Can you identify any practices that create barriers to housing for lgbt young people?

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12. Would you attend a training event or encourage members of your team to attend a training event about supporting lgbt young people in housing?

Yes ☐   No ☐

13. Would you find it useful to hear the experiences, in resources or training forums, of lgbt young people?

Yes ☐   No ☐

14. How do you respond to homophobia within your organisation?

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15. Does your organisation have access and equity or diversity policy statements that include lgbt young people?

Yes ☐   No ☐

Please comment.

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16. In a training forum, how relevant would these topics be to your service?
Please tick the box that best describes the relevance of each issue to you or your service.

	Not relevant	Maybe relevant	Very relevant
Understanding what sexuality and gender identity terms mean?	☐	☐	☐
Understanding where your values about lgbt young people come from?	☐	☐	☐
Practicing use of appropriate language with young people?	☐	☐	☐
Developing ways of supporting young people in the coming out processes?	☐	☐	☐
Impact of internalised homophobia on support with young people?	☐	☐	☐
Talking to family members of lgbt young people?	☐	☐	☐
Being aware of what resources are available to assist youth housing workers in working with lgbt young people?	☐	☐	☐
Strategies to challenging homophobia?	☐	☐	☐
Understanding the challenges faced by homeless lgbt young people?	☐	☐	☐

17. Are there any other topics, relevant to your service, that are not mentioned above?

Yes ☐   No ☐

Please comment.

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18. Finally, as part of this project we will be asking lgbt young people about their experiences of housing and support to assist with training of service providers and/or production of resources. What would you like to know from lgbt young people who have accessed housing and support services?

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Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

QUESTIONS FOR LGBT YOUNG PEOPLE & ACCESS TO HOUSING

Introduction:

Open Doors and QYHC are doing a project about lgbt young people and SAAP housing. We would like to try to find out from lgbt young people what their experience of housing in SAAP shelters and other accommodation has been.

We are doing this to try to get more people in housing services and in the government, who fund the services, to understand more about the needs of lgbt young people who may need safe housing.

We also have collected information from service providers by a questionnaire about what they think are the issues for them.

We want to use the information you provide in a report, but nothing that would identify you or the services you are talking about would go in.

To participate in the project through this interview, we need your consent on this form. (Separate consent form).

1. How old are you?

2. How do you describe yourself in regard to sexuality or gender identity?

3. How did you find out about accommodation services?

4. How many shelters or accommodation places have you stayed in and in what regions/areas?

5. What are your reasons for leaving any of the youth accommodation you have stayed in?

6. What is your current accommodation?

7. What things make accommodation feel safe? What things make a place feel unsafe? Please tell us about the staff, other residents or co-tenants, the physical environment and other factors.

8. Have you told people at the accommodation service of your sexuality or gender identity? Why or why not?

9. How did people (staff, other residents etc) in supported accommodation react to being told about your sexuality/gender identity?

10. Do you feel your privacy was protected?

11. In youth shelters and supported accommodation, do you think that heterosexual young people had similar experiences to you in terms of support offered and feeling safe?

12. Have you stayed at any accommodation places that you felt were supportive / lgbt friendly? What did they do that that let you know this?

13. How were the other young people towards lgbt young people?

14. Did service providers where you stay know about and link you to services/resources/information useful for lgbt young people?

15. Have you met any (other) transgender young people in accommodation? What would you say their experience/ time in the accommodation was like?

16. Do you have ideas about what services could do to be supportive of lgbt young people who stay in their accommodation?

Queensland Youth Housing Coalition Inc.

open Doors
YOUTH SERVICE INC.

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f 3876 2168	f 3257 7680
e network@qyhc.org.au	e pauline@opendoors.net.au

Consent Form for Interviews
LGBT Young People and Access to Housing Research Project

I understand I am being interviewed for a research project being done by Open Doors Youth Service and QLD Youth Housing Coalition.

I understand the interview I am giving for the project will be used (in part) in a report of this research.

I understand that my name and any identifying details will not be put in the report to protect my confidentiality.

I understand that the project agrees to show me a draft of the section in the report about young people and their experiences. If I decide I want to take something out from the information I gave (in full or part) I can revoke my consent for participation at this time.

After the time for feedback, I understand that the project will use my contributions in the report.

I understand and agree with how the project will use my interview information.

Signature of young person   Contact details for draft
Date:

Pauline Coffey
Open Doors Youth Service Inc
Date: