

Humans of Our Community: Tayla Lauren Ralph

Tayla is the co-founder of the incredibly successful social group 'Here we Queer', which is dedicated to providing safe-spaces and resources to individuals across South East Queensland who identify as a member of the LGBTQI+ community. Tayla shared with us how she went from a closed-minded all-girls Catholic school, to helping run an award winning LGBTQI+ organisation.



How was coming out as bisexual for you?

I never really had an official coming out experience. I definitely didn't throw a party! I really love seeing people on the Internet who have the confidence and brilliance to bake a rainbow cake and really make it a huge thing, I find it quite magical. My coming out was a lot tamer. I had come out of a long-term relationship with a guy and had started to date one of his best friends – my Here We Queer co-founder Phoebe! I told my Mum by telling her I was going on a date with a girl. We haven't really spoken about it since, so I'm going to assume she got the message. It's been three years, so I really hope she has.

What was it like growing up in Toowoomba and being bisexual?

It wasn't really the best experience! I went to an all-girls Catholic school, and whilst it definitely could have been worse, it certainly wasn't great. Like any religious school, I ran into a lot of problems. People who were openly LGBTQI+, or at least perceived to be, were treated as trouble makers. There were also a lot of parents who were concerned about this and weren't comfortable letting their children hang out with people who were open about their sexuality.

There certainly weren't any policies in place to protect me. It was almost as if being gay didn't exist. If anyone was questioning their sexuality or gender expression they had no support whatsoever. The school counsellor wasn't educated at all about the queer space. It was a really old school system, and their general way of thinking was that if it wasn't acknowledged, then it wasn't an issue, and I think they hoped it would just go away on its own.

I really do wish we had queer sexual health in school. I found it so hard to find anything. Even now, when I want to refer someone to an easy resource, they're difficult to find. It's already hard to deal with and accept your sexuality, but it's made even harder when you can't find the resources to support yourself at the time.

How do you feel female same-sex relationships are viewed by the world?

Within my family there were definitely two different sides to it. Gay men were treated and thought about as magical unicorns – especially when they were effeminate. Whilst we didn't think deeper into their personal lives, we loved them. In contrast, gay women were vilified, it was as if a lesbian relationship was dirty. I felt that gay women were only accepted for the sexual enjoyment of straight men. I have been out with girls and have had men egging us on to make out, as if we were there for their pleasure. I feel, as a bisexual woman, that female same-sex relationships are highly fetishized and, when sexual gratification is put aside, these relationships are looked down upon.

In the LGBTQI+ community, bisexual people have often been viewed as not fully deserving of a place within this space. Have you ever experienced judgement within the community based on your sexual orientation?

It can definitely seem a bit weird being a bisexual woman running a queer group, especially as I am currently in a heterosexual relationship. I have definitely had people imply to me that if you're not all the way in, then you shouldn't be in at all. This isn't something I normally get from the queer community, but I am often referred to as 'greedy' – I have been told I'm greedy so many times!

Overall, I definitely find this community to be overwhelmingly accepting and I feel like I have been embraced as a member of it.

What do you think Ally's need to do to be good ally's?

For me, I really appreciate anyone who can stand up for this community when they have the opportunity to. It doesn't necessarily have to be all the time, as I often think people are put into situations where they can't speak out. For me, being an ally doesn't always have to be out big things, but they can be small tokens and gestures of acceptance. We can argue all day about what constitutes being an ally, but ultimately, I think it comes down to whether or not they are supporting the community. We need to focus more on the bigger picture, and why need Ally's in the first place. There are places in the world that are living 50 years behind Australia. Places where you can be killed and imprisoned for being who you are. Places where you're forced to flee to places like Australia for your own safety. You can't be complacent just because being queer is OK in the city you're from. You might be in a safe space, but so many aren't. I think that's the issue we should be focusing on.

How did Here We Queer come about?

Phoebe, my co-founder, and I were very involved with the pride communities at uni and the events that they were running. We felt that some changes could be made to these events to make them even better. One thing we found really important was making the events free, or as low-



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cost as possible, so as many people can come as possible. Ultimately, it's our view that you shouldn't have to pay to feel safe. A lot of young people really want to go out and be educated, and we wanted to help provide a space to let them do this.

We started with one event in Toowoomba and the turn-out was a lot bigger than we had anticipated. From there we started to organise larger events, and whilst there have been a few flops, you learn from these failures and keep moving. At the moment we are running things such as queer film meet-ups, queer beers, and recently celebrated our first birthday with a fundraiser for Open Doors! The support we have had so far has been incredible!

What are the plans for Here We Queer's future?

Moving forward, we want to expand our online presence and really be as accessible as possible all around the world. It's why we run as .com, not .com.au. We want our website to be a place full of resources and queer media for anyone and everyone to access. For us, if you're queer and make something, we want to share that with the world. We want to maintain open communication, have people come to our events, and help queer people engage with their community! We also really want to continue collaborating. For us, our goal is to grow with other groups and create as many safe spaces as possible. People need places to go!

With Pride around the corner, we are running a 'Coming Out by Candle Light' event on September 28th— it will basically be a big, therapeutic space where people can share their coming out stories whilst being surrounded by a huge fire hazard. We are going to have music and drinks afterwards and we really think it's going to be amazing!

What inspired you to get involved in the community?

I feel like I'm the kind of person that needs to be doing things for other people. I show people that I love them by doing things for them. I want to feel like I made a difference in the world. I have 24 hours in a day, 8 might be taken up by a job, some more by sleep, so why not spend the rest of it doing everything I can to help other people? This isn't a chore to me, it's something I am really, really passionate about. I suffer from mental illness and I want to use this trauma, the stuff that really hurts the most, to drive me forward and do something absolutely brilliant.

"The struggle doesn't have to be your own anymore"

Do you have any advice for younger people who are questioning their sexuality or their gender expression?

There are so many places at your finger-tips - the struggle doesn't have to be your own anymore. There are places you can go and just be yourself, you don't necessarily have to talk about your problems. Qlife, Lifeline etc. are all amazing resources where you can go and just talk! I also think that being apart of events, such as the ones run by Here We Queer will help expose you to a wider community and will help you take small steps toward self-acceptance whilst also helping the wider LGBTQI+ community.



What would you say to your younger self if you could go back in time?

Nothing! I am so happy with where I am and the work that Here We Queer is doing. I think it's important to remain positive about the future and not harbour regret from the past. Plus, time travel seems like too much trouble and I'd probably completely mess up the future.