

Humans of Our Community: Phoebe Le Brocque

Phoebe is the inspiring co-founder of Here We Queer with a passion for making the world a better place. Phoebe shared with us her journey from Here We Queer's first social event in Toowoomba, to winning Young Achiever of the Year at the 2019 Brisbane Pride Queen's Ball.

Tell us about your journey of coming out.

It comes in stages, I don't know anyone who just does it in one go. I did listen to someone speak a few weeks ago who came out as trans and told the whole world in a Youtube video, which is amazing. I kind of find it sweet how people come out in stages, like a rainbow slowly spreading around you.

It really cemented itself for me in math class I had this unclear obsession with another girl and it very suddenly hit me that "oh, right, I have a crush on her". And my first reaction was to take all those feelings and bottle it down, which is so unhealthy as it blocks you socially from forming connections with people. I was so scared and a little socially inept... but it all turned out OK!

I told my friends first, which I think is pretty common. They're the people you spend the most time around, especially if you're in high school. It can be really helpful to get acceptance from those people first and tell your family when you're ready. Though, it can be a bit of a shock for your parents when they find out they're the only people in the world who didn't already know. When I told my Dad he was like "Are you sure?" and I was like "...Dad I've known for three years!".

How accessible do you think knowledge and support is for young people these days?

I think there is a difference between being available and being in sight. The information and support are there, but you have to find it. For example, QUAC (Queensland Aids Council) has so much information available, but they're not invited to schools to share this with students. So, unless you know where to find it, I'm not sure how available good, high quality resources are. I think that queer people are disproportionately late bloomers because discovering and accepting our queerness sets us back in social and emotional development. That's why we really need as much information as possible out there to help with this struggle. Coming out is always going to be scary, but with information and support, this process can be easier.

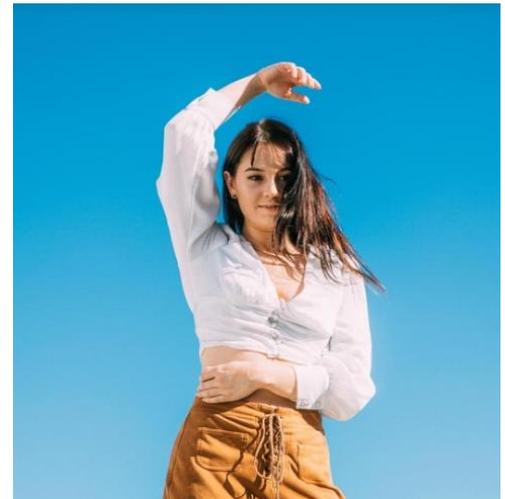


Photo by Tayla Lauren Ralph



What drove you to start Here We Queer?

A lot of what drove my interest in starting Here We Queer was seeing how exclusive some safe spaces were. I had spent a lot of time working on the Queer Collaborations conference which is aimed at, and aside from a few events, exclusive only to those in tertiary education. It sucked because people were limited from attending some awesome events. Back then, the only safe spaces that I knew were on University campuses. My co-founder Tayla and I really wanted to move out of these student circles and create more public safe spaces. It started with a small event in Toowoomba and it's been so rewarding creating a growing Here We Queer community.

One thing that's really important to us at Here We Queer is making a conscious effort to feature and highlight as many queer artists as possible. We really want Here We Queer to be about showcasing this talent and giving queer people a platform. All our events are also open to allies so they can engage and listen to queer stories, art, and experiences. We also take every measure possible to make sure that every event is wheelchair accessible. I think it would be going against our message if we didn't, as we want these events to be as inclusive as possible. Ultimately, we really just want to celebrate the local queer community and everyone who's apart of it.

How excited are you for Pride this month?

Tayla and I marched for the first time three years ago and we are so excited to be back marching together again this year!

One of the most powerful things about Pride is visibility. It's why I love that different cities have pride at different times. It's about embracing the local culture and pride events and celebrating the advocates in the area.

You can never underestimate the power of visibility. I read a study about it last year and visibility really is one of the best first steps towards promoting acceptance in a community. Just small things, like ally badges and rainbow flags – they have a huge impact. But beyond visibility, it's about letting people know that there's a community here, and there's a space to share, talk, and support one another. Sharing knowledge is another important way to promote acceptance.

With pride celebrations around the corner, I also think it's a good time to talk about the rise of "rainbow capitalism" and performative ally-ship. It can sometimes feel that large corporations are trying to make money off the plight of the LGBTQI+ community, and it's frustrating to feel exploited like that. I find performative activism more of a set-back than anything. It's like, when they put a rainbow flag on a water bottle, are they doing something to help LGBTQI+ folk in the community? Are they donating proceeds towards a foundation? Is there a core queer group behind the marketing?

“Having a human connection is so important for driving acceptance.”



We work with some incredible Australian brands at Here We Queer who don't just throw a rainbow on a water bottle, but rather provide us with the tools we need to run amazing events for people in our community. They display passion, connection, and commitment to our cause. They ask for so little in return, and I consider that genuine ally work, doing something that really benefits the community.

Talk to me about the importance of the human connection in promoting acceptance.

When I first came out my Mum needed time to come around. When she saw the work I was doing with Here We Queer, she eventually saw it as something to be really proud of. Last year when Here We Queer was really starting to pick up, one of her work colleagues was also beginning a gender transition. Prior to me coming out, I doubt she had had any contact with trans and gender diverse people, and I could tell her scepticism. But when a close friend began that journey, she found a new acceptance. It motivated her to learn about what they were going through. Having a human connection is so important for driving acceptance.

What advice would you give your younger self?

I think one thing that my younger self needed to learn was, be authentic. I was a messy mix of cripplingly shy and terribly annoying. I was either socially terrified or inept or desperately trying to compensate for my lack of confidence in myself. I needed to chill out. It's really hard to have authenticity. I'm still trying to learn and unlearn how to bring an authentic energy to my life.

What advice would you give to someone who is questioning their sexuality or gender?

Don't stress so much about it. I think our society puts too much emphasis on having a concrete idea of who you are, when in reality everyone goes through phases of wondering about who they are as a person. Questioning is just another part of life.

"I don't need to justify or clarify it to anyone. Let it come naturally until the right word clicks for you"

If doubt about your gender or sexual identity is causing you extreme pain or worry, I think it's great to reach out to trustworthy close people and talk about it - but if you're merely at a point of confusion, I wouldn't push too hard to "discover yourself". I've definitely been at those points before. In late high school I remember wondering whether I was lesbian or bisexual. Eventually I just left it alone - I let myself have relationships without fretting about the label. I've done the same with my gender identity - I know what my gender is and I'm comfortable with that. I don't need to justify or clarify it to anyone. Let it come naturally until the right word clicks for you, and never confirm to anyone else's view of who you should be.



Do you think you ever stop questioning your sexual orientation or gender?

It would be hypocritical for me to say I've stopped. I went through a big gender questioning stage a few years back. People change over time - and isn't it a terrible thing to not change and simply stay the same?

Interviewed and written by James Fowler, Volunteer of Open Doors Youth Service