

1 May 2015

Mr Peter Abetz MLA
Member for Southern River
Unit 4, 2 Furley Road
SOUTHERN RIVER WA 6110

By email: peter.abetz@mp.wa.gov.au

Dear Mr Abetz,

RE: In support of the Safe Schools Coalition Program

I write to you on behalf of the Australian Health Promotion Association (AHPA) WA Branch to encourage you to support the Safe Schools Coalition Program to help increase the number of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Questioning (LGBTIQ) young people who feel safe and accepted at school. Providing young people with sexual health education in a safe space is critical to improve knowledge and skills in consistently supportive environments. Bullying is a serious issue faced by many young people that often has severe consequences, such as mental health issues, and an increased risk of suicides.

LGBTIQ young people are some of our community's most at-risk people for mental health issues and suicide. LGBTIQ people in general are twice as likely to be at high to very high risk of psychological distress¹. Bullying toward LGBTIQ young people or those acting in a manner not seen as gender appropriate is often the result of a lack of understanding and knowledge towards diverse sexuality, and what is understood as bullying. Raising awareness of the damaging impact that bullying can have, identifying what is classified as bullying, increasing understanding that a person's sexuality is beyond their control, and empowering young LGBTIQ people will help reduce the rate of bullying².

Acknowledgement of LGBTIQ young people and acceptance of their choices will improve their sense of importance and self-worth resulting in better mental health outcomes. The Safe Schools Coalition Program is taking the necessary steps towards addressing a growing health problem among young Australians. Developing a holistic approach by educating staff, students, and parents means young people are receiving the key messages on a consistent level rather than having conflicted attitudes and values among the most influential people in their lives. School and home environments are the key setting young people are influenced within and therefore must be receiving reinforced messages within these environments to increase the likelihood of long term behavioural change.

It is critical to provide young people of all sexualities with appropriate education to prevent the transmission of STIs, increase testing rates and encourage healthy relationships that will ultimately result in improved mental health, reduced sexual and physical assault and reduced STI rates that will help improve the health of our young people. The provision of safe spaces and environments for

¹ Almeida, J., Johnson, R. M., Corliss, H. L., Molnar, B. E., & Azrael, D. (2009). Emotional distress among LGBT youth: the influence of perceived discrimination based on sexual orientation. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 38 (7), 1001-1014.

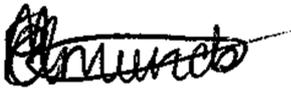
² Tfofi, M., & Farrington, D. (2011). Effectiveness of school-based programs to reduce bullying: a systematic and meta-analytic review. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, 7 (1), 27-56.

young LGBTIQ people increases participation, attendance, and concentration at school³. Through increased participation, young people receive the education they need and that is appropriate to their gender or sexuality to improve sexual health outcomes.

In a society that is moving toward a greater acceptance of LGBTIQ people, the Safe Schools Coalition Program is important to ensure Australia is a leading nation in the fight against homophobia and paths the way for other countries to follow.

Please do not hesitate to contact me on adminwa@healthpromotion.org.au if there is any way the AHPA (WA Branch) can be of assistance.

Kind regards,



Melinda Edmunds
President
Australian Health Promotion Association (WA Branch)

CC: Safe Schools Coalition Australia national office
Sally Richardson
National Program Director
Email: safeschools@fya.org.au

³ Walls, N. E., Kane, S. B., & Wisneski, H. (2010). Gay-Straight Alliances and School Experiences of Sexual Minority Youth. *Youth & Society*, 41 (3), 307-332.