

Project Whisper – Sexual Health Program for LGBTQI Young People

Description

Project Whisper is a sexual health promotion project targeting young LGBTQI people within the Nepean Blue Mountains Local Health District. The project is a successful partnership using the arts for better health outcomes. With the commitment of the Q Theatre, based at the Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre in Penrith and the support of ACON, the Health Promotion team works with a hard to reach priority population.

Project Whisper started with a facilitated discussion aimed to identify what the young LGBTQI community saw as the issues they faced living in western Sydney. From this discussion, workshops were designed to allow young LGBTQI people to express their issues creatively. The workshops culminated into a performance by young LGBTQI people during Mini Gras at the Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre. The performance highlighted the experiences of being a young LGBTQI person in Western Sydney.

Social media platforms are used for young LGBTQI people to link in with a support network of others who feel isolated, may be unable to attend owing to family, religious or cultural pressures, and may think they are the only young LGBTQI person facing those issues.

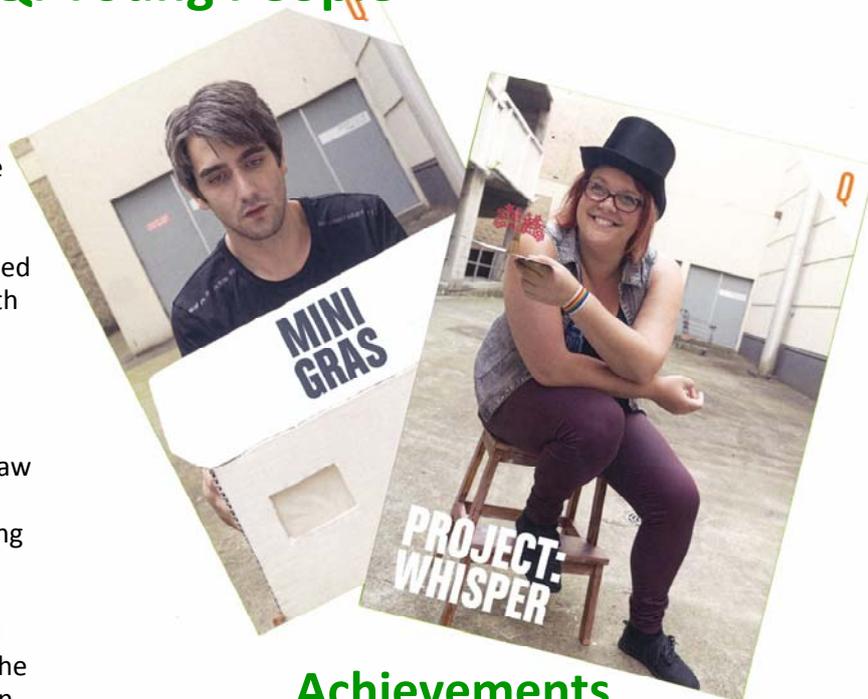
Project Aims

This targeted and innovative education and community development intervention:

- raises the awareness of sexual health issues while normalising safe sex and health seeking behaviours
- encourages and supports the uptake of condoms, increasing testing for STIs and HIV, and other prevention and risk reduction strategies
- breaks down social isolation and establishes a sense of community through the development of networks amongst young LGBTQI

¹ Face the facts: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex People, Australian Human Rights Commission website

² Growing up Queer//Issues Facing Young Australians Who are Gender Variant and Sexually Diverse.



Achievements

- The Project received funding under the Clubs Grants from Penrith Panthers
- Strong partnership developed with the Arts
- Many students from a Stand Out group at one local high school were involved in the project. This group is part of the SAFE Schools Coalition, a commonwealth program.
- Participants, and those young LGBTQI people who become involved through social media, this project will help overcome the issue of social isolation
- 'Allies' became involved too, these young heterosexual people supporting their LGBTQI friends by getting involved in the backstage, lighting and sound aspects of theatre production.
- Project Whisper has been accepted as a Poster Presentation at the HIV and Related Programs (HARP) Forum in October 2016.

Future Directions

- Sustainability is built into the project to link young LGBTQI people to the Young People's Program - The Q theatre.
- Arts projects that reflect the broader issues faced by young LGBTQI people add to the mix of local discussion and development of programs which meet the needs of these young people.

Fast Facts about LGBTQI Health Issues

- Young people aged 16 to 24 years are most likely to hide their sexuality or gender identity.¹
- LGBTQI young people report experiencing verbal homophobic abuse (61 per cent), physical homophobic abuse (18 per cent) and other types of homophobia (9 per cent), including cyberbullying, graffiti, social exclusion and humiliation.¹
- Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people are three times more likely to experience depression compared to the broader population.¹
- 42% of the LGBTQI population have thought about self-harm and/or suicide.²
- 16% of young people who identify as LGBTQI have attempted suicide²
- Social isolation is a major issue facing young LGBTQI people in western Sydney.