



What's Important to YOUTh



MINUS18 FOUNDATION

The Minus18 Foundation started in 1998 in response to the high rates of bullying and abuse faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) Youth.

Now, with more than 50 youth volunteers, Minus18 supports tens of thousands of Melbourne young people by providing safe places, support, mental health referrals, and through the health promotion and awareness raising of the high rates of mental health issues experienced by LGBTI youth.

HARM AND SUICIDE PREVENTION

LGBTI youth face higher rates of bullying due to homophobia and transphobia, which can lead to higher rates of depression, anxiety and suicide than non-LGBTI young people. Through health promotion and campaigns, Minus18 work to reduce the rates of homophobia and transphobia, and the subsequent mental health problems that occur.

YOUTH EMPOWERING YOUTH

Minus18 believe that the best and most effective way to empower young people is for other young people to be the ones engaging with them. All Minus18 projects adopt full youth participation models of practice, and are imagined, organised and run by the Minus18 Crew, in partnership with supporting adult mentors, organisational representatives and Board members.

SOCIAL INCLUSION

Social isolation due to location, homophobic and transphobic bullying can lead to mental health problems and lack of confidence. Minus18 combat social isolation through providing a place where young people feel they belong and are 100% safe and supported. Participation in Minus18 events fosters this sense of inclusion in a preventative model of mental health support.

Australia's largest youth led charity for LGBTI youth.

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19a Willian St Cremorne VIC 3121

ABN: 60 829 316 980

RECOMMENDATIONS

EDUCATION

1. Mandatory rollout of the Safe Schools Coalition program to all schools within Victoria, including LGBTI inclusivity training for all education staff, and LGBTI-specific anti bullying initiatives for students.
2. Implementation of gender-neutral bathrooms, change rooms and uniform options within primary and secondary schools to better facilitate the needs of transgender students.
3. Implementation of a mandatory and inclusive sexual education curriculum, specifically detailing information for LGBTI young people.
4. Development of curriculum for secondary school students with a focus on broader life skills, such as writing resumes, filing a tax return, and skills for interviewing for jobs.

EMPLOYMENT

5. Further development resources and support for young workers on their rights within the workplace, focusing on information for those who are experiencing discrimination and unfair treatment.

DISCRIMINATION

6. LGBTI identities should be acknowledged and validated in all areas of government. Gender diverse and transgender identities in particular should be acknowledged through the intake of data and demographics in all areas.

MENTAL HEALTH

7. Mandatory professional development and training for mental health professionals should be provided on LGBTI inclusivity and best practice.
8. Removal of barriers for transgender young people in accessing treatment, including removal of psychologist approval to begin hormone replacement therapy (HRP) and requirement for both parents' consent to access puberty blockers.

ALCOHOL AND DRUGS

9. Reduce the stigma associated with drug use to increase conversations about healthier and safer usage through the decriminalisation of lower class recreational drugs (such as marijuana and ecstasy), establishment of personal drug testing facilities as well as reducing the level youth-targeted enforcement (such as the use of sniffer jobs at youth centric events).

HOUSING

10. Increased funding for LGBTI specific crisis and homeless support.

METHOD

METHOD 1

GROUP CONSULTATION – Saturday 10th of October

The group consultations employed a focus-group style methodology. The questions asked were in line with the questions provided, with more focus on the earlier questions due to time restrictions.

Advertising and engagement

Young people have been engaged and invited to attend the group consultation via Minus18 Social Media channels, in particular the Youth Steering Committee Facebook page, the Minus18 Crew Members Facebook page, and the “TEAMER” meeting app.

The following text was used to engage with the young people:

We're working to support the Victorian Government's new youth policy. You can have your say about what's important to you (things like mental health and education, all the stuff you guys care about!). It's an awesome chance to have your voice heard. Let us know below if you want to come! It will take place after the Crew Meeting on Saturday 3th October.

Due to Grand Final Weekend, the consultation was moved back one week, and the above message was then reposted with the new date, October 10th.

The Group Consultation took place immediately after the monthly Minus18 Crew Meeting, in the youth area of the Minus18 Atrium Office, to maximise participant engagement and support the young people in minimise burdens such as travel and time restraints.

Facilitation and Materials

Two young people from the Minus18 youth steering committee were nominated to facilitate the Group Consultation. They were supported by the Minus18 CEO and Minus18 Youth Support Worker, who briefed the young people prior to the facilitation.

Materials used were group brain storming on a digital whiteboard and well as breaking off into individual discussion groups for certain questions with note paper..

Questions

- **The key issues were shown on the digital white board:**
How important are these issues to you? Please number these in order of importance from 1= most important,
- **Who had [Issue 1] in their top 3? Let's go round in a circle and talk a bit about why it was in your top 3. What makes this issue important to you as a young person? What about as an LGBTI young person?** (repeated for all issues)
- **Are there any issues not up on the board that you think should be?**
- **What could the government do to support these issues? What action could be taken?**
- **These are the draft objectives. Do you feel these are inclusive of your identity?**
- **What actions could the government take to fulfil these objectives?**

- Who here would be interested in co-design with the government? Out of these ways listed, which would you be interested in?

METHOD 2

INTERVIEWS – Monday 12th of October – Monday 26th October

Advertising and engagement

Young people from within Minus18 were invited to attend one on one interviews via direct message and email. The interviews took place at the Minus18 Atrium Office (19a William St, Cremorne 3121) at times that best suit the young people.

Facilitation and Materials

The Minus18 CEO facilitated one on one verbal interviews. No materials were used. The interviews were used as an opportunity to capture areas of data that were missed during the initial consultations (method 1).

Questions

- The key issues were given:
How important are these issues to you? Which 3 of these issues are the most important to you as an LGBTI young person?
What makes these issues important to you as a young person?
What are your experiences with these issues? Can you share a story with me about a time when this issue impacted you?
- What could the government do to support these issues? What action could be taken?
- These are the draft objectives. Do you feel these are inclusive of your identity?
- What actions could the government take to fulfil these objectives?
- Who here would be interested in co-design with the government? Out of these ways listed, which would you be interested in?

DEMOGRAPHICS

NOTE: The original reporting guidelines did not capture transgender or gender diverse identities – the young people consulted saw this as an oversight, and felt quite strongly that they should be included in the demographics listings below.

	Method	#	Age	Gender	Background	Location
Group Consultation	1	31	14-23	6 – male 8 – female 17 – gender diverse	28 – Australian born 3 – CALD	RR – 10 M – 21
Interviews	2	7	16-21	2 – male 3 – female 2 – gender diverse	6 – Australian born 1 – CALD	RR – 3 M – 4
TOTAL		38		8 – male 11 – female 19 – gender diverse	34 – Australian born 4 – CALD	RR – 13 M – 25

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OUTCOMES

WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO YOUNG PEOPLE

EDUCATION

Method 1: 15 of the young people identified Education in their top three themes important to them.

Method 2: 2 of the young people identified Education in their top three themes important to them.

“Education is one of my most important issues because it can provide so many opportunities. It leads to a lot of the other issues, and is the baseline for so many of them. I didn’t really feel that my education was inclusive of my sexuality. I had to move schools because of homophobia at the start of senior school, so that was pretty disruptive. When I felt good at school, I definitely performed better, and that’s pretty important.” – David, 20 years old

- 92% of the young people had experienced negative outcomes around their sexuality or gender identity during their secondary education. Teachers were most cited as an enabler of homophobia and transphobia, and teachers who did not ‘stick up’ for LGBTI students were seen to have the biggest detrimental impact.
- 73% said that their health classes missed out vital information relating to sexuality, gender identity, and sexual health:
“Puberty education for me was very binary. I was discovering myself as a transgender boy, and all the information being taught was ‘Boys and Girls’ – there was no room in there for anything about what I was going through. I had to turn to the internet, which was isolating and not really something someone in high school should have to do.” John, 17 year old transgender boy

“We had one day at school, ONE DAY, on drugs, mental health and alcohol. It felt like the teachers brought someone in for the day so they could tick the box, and then it was never spoken about again.” – Alex, 17 years old
- 30% identified a lack of ‘real life skills’ as their concern, citing problems in their life arising from leaving secondary school and having to self learn vital skills such as a CV writing, job interview abilities, and filing tax returns.

EMPLOYMENT

Method 1: 14 of the young people identified this focus area in their top 3 that were important to them.

Method 2: 1 of the young people identified this focus area in their top 3 that were important to them.

Transgender and gender diverse young people experienced some of the biggest issues surrounding employment.

Documentation aligning to gender identity was seen as a common problem for transgender young people.

Discrimination in the workforce due to sexuality and/or gender identity was the most common problem cited.

“As if discrimination against young people in the workforce isn’t bad enough, I find the workforce discriminates against transgender youth. As soon as a potential employer meets you face to face and sees that you’re transgender, they put you in the too-hard-basket. You just see that look on their face that they’re confused by your gender. No one wants to hire you, and there’s not really anything you can do about it.” Arianna

“I find it really hard to get a job when all my papers and documentation still have a different name and a different gender. I have no right to change all those papers at my age and at my stage of transition, and it’s really hard for me to find a job in a regular setting while those papers don’t reflect my true identity. Lots of employees don’t know how to interact with trans youth people and so choose not to.”

Katy 16 years old

“I’ve been working for 4 or 5 years now, I work for Woolworths and have met a lot of high up people, who are set in their ways, they require new staff to all have experience which obviously isn’t inclusive to young people. There are very lax attitudes towards sexism; they are very homophobic too. They don’t want to deal with you if you fall outside of their idea of normal, because they have other straight, cisgender people to choose from. Why would they choose you if they perceive your identity as a challenge?” Tom, 22 years old

“I’ve been struggling for a long time to get a job, but I’ve dealt with workplace bullying, really horrible bosses who took advantage of my age and because they saw me as a quiet person. The workforce still retains ideals that young people are useless and don’t know how to work. Even though I had experience afterwards, employers use your vulnerability as a young person against you; I was pressured into doing more shifts, skipping university because I was told I would be fired if I reduced my hours, and given information about my rights that was just plain wrong. Jobs are rare and employers know it, so they take advantage of it and use your vulnerability against you.” Jacob, 23 years old

- 83% identified their sexual or gender identity as being a barrier for them in gaining or maintaining employment.
- 76% agreed they did not know what to do when they experienced difficulties at work.

TRAINING

Method 1: 2 of the young people identified this focus area in their top 3 that were important to them

Method 2: 0 of the young people identified this focus area in their top 3 that were important to them.

- “I personally went through TAFE and being there and seeing all the other courses... it’s a huge stepping stone and a great opportunity. I wish all those opportunities could be shared a bit broader. Those pathways aren’t always clear for other people. TAFE is great and more people should know that.” – Edward 23 years old

MENTAL HEALTH

Method 1: 29 of the young people identified this focus area in their top 3 that were important to them

Method 2: 7 of the young people identified this focus area in their top 3 that were important to them.

All the young people said they felt positive about their sexual and gender identity, and felt frustrated that mental health professionals often assumed being LGBTI was the 'cause' of their mental health problems.

Professionals who lacked knowledge of LGBTI experiences make young people feel frustrated and disengaged.

Transgender and gender diverse young people in particular felt extremely negatively towards what they described as 'the mental health system', with many sharing stories of discrimination and mistreatment from health professionals.

Queer specific services were seen as the most effective places for support, but often seemed under staffed or operating in limited capacity.

- "Mental health is a big focus for me because I've been shuffled through the system since I was 14. Services send you from one place to another, with different advice every single time. It's always so inconsistent."
- Indigo, 22 years old
- "I've spent most of my sessions giving my psych a 101 course on sexual and gender diversity. It's f*cked. No one knows how to deal with trans issues at all. I even had one case where a health professional actively blocked me from getting treatment because he didn't understand what being transgender really meant. I always feel like I'm the first LGBTI person they've ever seen. The information (about sexual and gender diversity) is constantly changing and evolving and they just don't seem interested in keeping up. I'm well connected and I hate educating them. I want to spend my time with them productively." – James 22 years old
- "I feel like a big issue is self diagnosis with young people. They are so scared of going to mental health services, or they've run out of their 10 free sessions, so they look online for support and they Google things themselves because they don't know what to or actively can't access services." – John 19 year old
- "I was forced to see psychs to get their 'approval' for surgeries for transitioning my gender. The whole process worsened my mental health, and I felt awful going through it all. There was one in particular who deliberately misgendered me and refused to acknowledge that I was trans. This person wrote letters to my other health providers saying transphobic things and gave his (very uninformed opinion) about what it means to be transgender. I'm a young person and I was seen as someone who didn't know what I was talking about and treated like I was

stupid.” – Britney 20 years old

- “I faced a barrier seeking help, because my psych at school told me I was being hard on my parents and that I needed to “make a cup of tea”. I was told my problems weren’t really needed to be worried about. You’re just a teenager and these feelings are normal. But these got compounded and they really hit me at uni and later in life. When I discussed it with my parents they tell me to “get over it” and that I was “just making it hard for myself”. Oliver 21 years old

ALCOHOL AND DRUGS

Method 1: 19 of the young people identified this focus area in their top 3 that were important to them

Method 2: 3 of the young people identified this focus area in their top 3 that were important to them.

Young people felt the stigma surrounding drug use caused them and their peers to feel isolated, and prohibited them from discussing their experiences. Young people cited stories where their friends refused to engage in support services due to stigma and shame.

Mental health problems were seen as being intertwined with drug and alcohol use amongst LGBTI young people, and the impact that discrimination can have.

Many young people felt that current drug messaging (such as the Anti-Ice Campaign) did nothing to help them as young people support their friends.

89% of the young people felt the conversations around drug and alcohol use needed to be around safety and education, rather than prevention and punishment.

Some young people said they felt ‘betrayed’ by government drug messaging, because it did not align with their experiences, and only caused mistrust.

Methods of support for drug users, such as testing facilities and decriminalisation of personal usage were favourably discussed as opportunities to provide education and allow young people to access supportive care, rather than disengage due to fear of punishment.

- “I haven’t experienced any issues around alcohol and drugs personally, but I have heaps of friends who have. I have no idea how to support them, and I hate when information stigmatises them as people, because the information in ads doesn’t align with what I see of my friend. They can’t talk to their family, and they fear going to a doctor because they’re told they’re bad people, and this makes them feel sh*t about themselves. And what do they do when you feel like that? More drugs.” – Alice, 16

DISCRIMINATION

Method 1: 26 of the young people identified this focus area in their top 3 that were important to them

Method 2: 5 of the young people identified this focus area in their top 3 that were important to them.

Discrimination was seen to be a core issue experienced by all LGBTI people, and was raised as being a problem experienced in nearly all other identified issues – especially education, mental health and employment.

All the young people discussed discrimination and being something they had experienced and many expressed anger towards those experiences.

Due to the nature of the young people being consulted with, 100% of the young people expressed a desire to 'do something about it (discrimination)' – and activities such as volunteering in community organisations (such as Minus18) or being involved in advocacy work were of extreme importance to them.

While discrimination faced included due to sexuality or gender identity, the LGBTI young people still highlighted experiences of racial discrimination and discrimination due to age as problems faced.

78% felt that a lack of visibility was enough to make them feel discriminated against, particularly when their sexuality or gender identity was not represented in youth services or government:

- "When I see the question "What is your Gender?" on a school or government survey and my gender is not there, I think "Why is my identity an "OTHER?" why are female and male the only two being recognised. Sometimes there isn't even a third option." – Jacob 19

Some young people (around 25%) said they actively avoided community participation due to the fear of discrimination.

The primary areas of discrimination highlighted were:

- from law enforcement
- at secondary school, from peers and teachers
- in the workforce (both gaining and maintaining employment)
- in the home, from parents and guardians
- from health professionals

HOUSING

Method 1: 10 of the young people identified this focus area in their top 3 that were important to them

Method 2: 3 of the young people identified this focus area in their top 3 that were important to them.

Young people felt that moving out of home was commonly talked about as a 'luxury' and something to do 'when you are ready'. But many had experienced pressure to move out, citing problematic relationships with parents due to sexuality or gender identity as a common problem.

A lack of LGBTI specific crisis housing support within Victoria was discussed by many of the young people. 8 of the young people had at some stage tried to access crisis support but were unsuccessful.

The process of being classified as independent for Centrelink was seen as a large barrier for LGBTI

young people, as this often requires parents being involved in the process, which was seen by some as unsafe or simply not an option for them.

Many felt LGBTI young people use social media instead of main stream services due to fear of assault and discrimination. Facebook pages specifically setup for LGBTI couch surfing were cited as the most commonly accessed support options.

- "There is always a waiting list for LGBTI people who need housing. LGBTI young people are not trusting of conventional services and there needs to be more accessible support. I tried to access support and got turned away. Really, I just had no idea what to do when I needed support and I felt so alone".

TRANSPORT

Method 1: 6 of the young people identified this focus area in their top 3 that were important to them

Method 2: 2 of the young people identified this focus area in their top 3 that were important to them.

The high cost of transport for young people was seen to be the most prevalent issue.

Access to public transport options in regional areas was also a major issue, with 5 young people discussing how a lack of services caused them to feel isolated and disconnected from their friends.

Many felt unsafe on public transport, particularly those who did not conform to rigid gender stereotypes. Many cited cases of verbal homophobic and transphobic abuse.

DRAFT OBJECTIVES

The young people who identified as gender diverse or transgender did not feel the draft objectives were inclusive of their identity.

All young people in both methods of consultation felt it is important to be inclusive of gender diversity in the draft objectives. In order to do this, it is vital to specifically mention "gender identity", in place of (rather than in addition to) 'gender', as per below. This would be the most appropriate, all-inclusive terminology.

- *Are given a fair go no matter their ethnicity, gender **identity**, sexual orientation, disability, health, religion, mental health status or whether they live in a rural or regional location.*

No other feedback was given by the young people.

Language

Preferred language by the young people consulted with:

- Same sex attracted and gender diverse young people
- LGBTI

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- Sexuality and gender identity

Language to avoid:

- Transsexualism
- Transgendered (use instead, transgender)
- Sexual preference (use instead, sexuality, sexual identity, or sexual orientation)

Co design

14 of the young people consulted with said they would be open to further co design of Victorian policies.

The preferred methods, in order from most desirable, to least desirable are:

1. Community advisory groups
2. Further online consultation
3. Face to face interviews
4. Reviewing reports
5. Engage as peer leaders for the roll out of any programs

CONCLUSION

The young people consulted with demonstrated a very diverse range of views on the focus issue, yet the most common theme arising was that regardless of the focus issue, an LGBTI young person's sexual or gender identity is core to their experiences. Because of this, their experiences were unique, and need to be treated as such.

Due to the experienced discrimination and the perceived fear of discrimination, the LGBTI young people were very distrusting of mainstream services, instead opting to turn to their peers for support in nearly all areas, especially relating to mental health, housing, and alcohol and drugs.

In particular, the experiences of young people who identified as transgender and gender diverse were very heavily negative, with experiences of systematic and social discrimination, abuse and isolation. Many expressed feelings of invisibility from mainstream services and government, who often look to support sexuality, without considering the needs and inclusion of transgender and gender diverse young people.

Conversations were overly distrusting of mainstream services and communities as a whole, with the young people expressing a distinct disengagement from these services. Yet despite the negative focus of experiences and opinions, the LGBTI young people consulted with were actively engaged within LGBTI specific services and communities. Many of them spoke passionately about their experiences, and expressed strong desires to further advocate for change within mainstream community and services, as well as to have their opinions listened to.

LGBTI young people do not trust or have regular support networks.

LGBTI Identity was a common factor in ALL issues.

Experiences of discrimination underlined all themes.

Young people were passionate and eager to advocate for better services.

ISSUES

- The Group Consultation has been planned for Grand Final Weekend, and needed to be moved to the following weekend in order to best engage with the young people.
- Time restraints – many of the young people felt passionate about certain issues, and were given extra time to provide feedback on these. This meant other areas of the consultation were given less time (or had to be skipped altogether).
- The young people in the group consultation wanted to highlight their gender diversity within the demographics section. A large number (50%) did not identify as male or female.

REFERENCES

The following documents have been reviewed prior to the consultations.

- Hillier, L., et al. (2010). Writing themselves in 3: The 3rd national study on the sexual health and wellbeing of SSAGQ young people. Melbourne: ARCSHS.
- Jones, T., & Hillier, L. (2013). Comparing Trans-Spectrum and Same-sex Attracted Youth: Increased risks, increased activism. LGBT Youth, 10(4), 287–307.
- Smith, E., Jones, T., Ward, R., Dixon, J., Mitchell, A., & Hillier, L. (2014). From Blues to Rainbows: Mental health and wellbeing of gender diverse and transgender young people in Australia. Melbourne: The Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health, and Society