Creating safe and supportive spaces



By Sharmila Nagar
Vice President

The SSTUWA recently held its inaugural LGBTIQ+ forum on *How to Create a Safe and Supportive Space for LGBTIQ+ Staff and Students in Schools and TAFEs*.

This forum was an opportunity to help our members understand and navigate strategies around sexual and gender diversity to support staff and students in schools and TAFEs, while also learning about how to tackle discrimination in this area.

Presenters at the forum included LGBTIQ+ Committee members Kai Griffiths (they/them) and Lexi Goff (she/her), Rowan Richardson (he/him) from the AEU Tasmania branch and John Theodorsen (he/him) and Mario Schmidt (he/him) from SSTUWA's Legal Services Team.

Lexi Goff discussed how to create a safe queer space in an educational setting for students. Lexi shared the rationale she created for her school leadership team to consider addressing the needs of a growing number of LGBTIQ+ students at her school.

The rationale outlined the overarching goals for the school in education, visibility and advocacy and stated the requirements needed to fulfil this role.

Kai Griffiths' presentation aimed to equip members with an understanding of the resources and tools already available and how to use them to build and protect inclusive environments. They also provided useful strategies when dealing with counter arguments towards inclusivity in educational settings.

Kai shared their school's same sex attracted, intersex and gender diverse policy which was well received by all. The first line of the policy reads: "All students benefit, academically and socially, when provided with a high quality, inclusive education."

The key outcomes from Rowan's workshop were to identify the unique challenges LGBTIQ+ educators face and actions that can be taken back to workplaces.

He focused on how diverse and inclusive spaces often do not support staff. Rowan used Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model to uncover the complex layers within human development and how they shape individual growth.

Rowan utilised this to map out the experiences faced by many LGBTIQ+ educators and what small actions we can all take to improve their lives.

Bigger changes could include making our agreement more inclusive. Currently SSTUWA's LGBTIQ+ Committee has included gender transition leave, which was endorsed at June 2023 State Council. This has been added in both the schools and TAFE Log of Claims.

The final session of the day was with staff from SSTUWA's Legal Services Team. Both John and Mario helped members understand and tackle discrimination. The key message of support being that in the case of discrimination, the union will support, advise and represent members.

This includes, but not limited to, assisting with internal resolution options at a workplace/department level and/or assisting with an application to the Equal Opportunity Commission.

Our first forum was undoubtedly successful, as highlighted in the feedback received:

- "Practical and applicable advice - particularly for [working] with colleagues/parents and setting up clubs."
- "This was a great presentation on the avenues available to staff facing discrimination."
- "This presentation was extremely informative and I look forward to reviewing this information with my executive team."
- "Great to hear a lived experience that is positive and fulfilling."
- "Clear and effective strategies for teachers to action and establish in their schools."
- "I would love to see all schools/educators attend a forum like this, not just those with a particular interest."

As always, a day like this is impossible with our tremendous staff at the SSTUWA. Thank you to the Education and Training Centre staff and Marie-Louise Earle-Sadler for making sure the day ran smoothly. Thanks also to our fantastic presenters for their time and preparation.

LGBTIQ+ Committee's input in the current Log of Claims

The proposed Log of Claims includes gender transition leave that has been worked through by the committee, with research assistance from Dr Sean Mulcahay from La Trobe University.

The claim reads: A staff member who is affirming their gender is entitled to 30 days paid leave per annum if they are undergoing gender transition or require time to define their gender. The leave may be used for, but is not limited to:

- Attending medical appointments.
- Medical procedures and recovery.
- Attending to any legal matters.
- Any other activity related to the staff member's gender affirmation.

This leave is provided in addition to any other leave entitlements that may be available to the staff member.

Disclaimer: In this article inclusive/inclusivity refers to all within our communities receiving equal respect and opportunities regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation.

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