Safe and Supported Handbook

A guide for councils

Target group: LGBTIQA+ young people

Setting: Community & education

Key health promotion strategies: Direct participation; community strengthening

Acknowledgements

Traditional owner acknowledgement

VicHealth acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands on which these programs operate. We pay our respects to all Elders past, present and future.

Acknowledgement of contributing councils

We would like to acknowledge the work of Cardinia Shire and others who co-created and developed the Safe and Supported (SAS) program in 2017. Some of the content in this handbook is taken from the Bright Futures Challenge Project Implementation Guide written by Cardinia Shire Council in 2019.

We would also like to acknowledge Glenelg Shire and the City of Whittlesea who ran this program during 2019-2020 and contributed to the writing of this handbook.

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Background

The Safe and Supported (SAS) program was first created as part of the [VicHealth Bright Futures for Young Victorians Challenge](#) (or Bright Futures Challenge), a key initiative within the VicHealth strategic imperative to 'improve mental wellbeing'.

The Challenge aims to build resilience, social connection and mental wellbeing in young people (12–25 years old) and also to strengthen the leadership of local governments in improving the mental wellbeing of young people.

We know that this age range is a critical period for personal development – characterised by important transitions through education, work, family and relationships. During this time, young people are developing physically, intellectually and emotionally, while forming autonomous identities, building independent social networks and initiating intimate relationships.

In 2015, in partnership with CSIRO, VicHealth released the [Bright Futures Megatrends Report](#). The research report described five global 'megatrends' that are likely to have an impact on the mental wellbeing of young people in the next two decades. These megatrends are likely to affect the social, environmental and economic aspects of young people's lives and also on the transitions and changes that occur during this critical period.

The Bright Futures for Young Victorians Challenge was launched by VicHealth in 2016, supporting Victorian councils to develop responses to the identified megatrends and solutions to promote young people's resilience, social connection and mental wellbeing.

The first phase of the Bright Futures Challenge enabled 12 local councils to work directly with young people to co-design and create new programs and initiatives in their local area.

The second phase of the Bright Futures Challenge provided further funding for several of those local councils to expand their program. This phase provided funding for several new councils to join the Challenge by creating new programs and initiatives.

The third phase of the Bright Futures Challenge saw a focus on councils integrating the learnings and achievements of the most promising projects from the first two phases.

In consultation with councils, and based on program evaluation data, VicHealth identified four Bright Futures projects in 2018–9 that showed strong promise for positive health outcomes and potential to be replicated and embedded by more councils. The four councils that initiated these programs were appointed as 'Integration Mentors' with the specific goals of (a) supporting other councils to replicate the program, and (b) sustaining and embedding the program within their own council business and services.

The SAS program is one of the four Bright Futures programs that was selected for integration. Cardinia Shire Council was the Integration Mentor for this program and worked closely with Glenelg Shire and the City of Whittlesea to replicate the program in those councils.

VicHealth was proud to lead the Bright Futures Challenge during 2016-2020 in partnership with local councils and with young Victorians. Following the evaluation and integration phase, all four of the most promising Bright Futures projects are now available for all local councils to deliver and adapt in their local area. For more information see the VicHealth website.

About the program

Target group: LGBTIQA+ young people

Setting: Community & education

Key health promotion strategies: Direct participation; community strengthening

The Safe and Supported program aims to reduce the risk of abuse, discrimination, bullying and isolation among young people who identify as LGBTIQA+. The acronym 'LGBTIQA+' is an evolving acronym that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning, asexual and many other terms (such as non-binary and pansexual) that people use to describe their experiences of their gender, sexuality, and physiological sex characteristics.

The program seeks to ensure that young people feel safe and supported at home, school and within the wider community by delivering a range of initiatives and engaging young people to guide those strategies.

The program is made up of five key initiatives:

1. In-school and after-school social support and advocacy groups for young people aged 12–24 years.
2. Online resources to enable anonymous access to support.
3. Parent education and support.
4. Education for council employees, council management, professionals, teachers and the wider community.
5. Events and activities co-designed with young people.

Youth Participation

Youth participation is actively involving young people in decision-making processes. The concept is related to ideas of citizenship, personal development, and involvement in society.

As a practice, youth participation involves young people in activities, organisations, government and community structures, and engages them on issues that directly affect them, like individual care or learning plans, and wider community-based projects. It is all about meaningful opportunities for young people, valuing their contributions and empowering them to help shape our world.

Key principles
- Empowerment: Young people having greater control over their lives through participation.
- Purposeful engagement: Young people taking on valued roles, addressing issues that are relevant to them, and influencing real outcomes.
- Inclusiveness: Ensuring all young people are able to participate, regardless of background, culture, where they live, their gender or sexuality.

Some ways young people participate
- Consulting about their ideas and opinions
- Researching issues and taking action on something effecting their lives
- Planning or leading projects, activities or events
- Taking part in youth committees or forums
- Taking part in adult-defined decision-making bodies.

Youth participation is a 'doing' word
Think about youth participation as an ongoing approach – it's not tokenism, or something to be ticked off or done as a once-off. It supports young people to act, to make their own decisions

and advocate for themselves, rather than considering them passive 'clients' with decisions being made for them.

Why it's important

Young people are experts in their own lives. Young people have the contemporary, real-world knowledge and experience of issues and opportunities impacting them and their communities. Therefore, to resolve these issues or take advantage of the opportunities, it makes sense to speak with young people, not for them, and for them to speak for themselves. However, young people often face limited options to be heard on the many different things they care about and are affected by.

Young people's participation in civic and community life is a human right

The [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) clearly state that young people have the right to participate and contribute in decision making processes that affect them.

- Article 12: You have the right to say what you think should happen when adults are making decisions that affect you, and to have your opinions taken into account.
- Article 13: You have the right to get, and to share, information as long as the information is not damaging to yourself or others.
- Article 15: You have the right to meet with other children and young people and to join groups and organisations, as long as this does not stop other people from enjoying their rights.

Youth participation helps address power imbalances

Young people are largely underrepresented, often misrepresented, and rarely included in government or community decisions which affect them. Similarly, professionals or practitioners working with young people often fail to actively seek their views and opinions or meaningfully involve them in planning, implementing and evaluating the work. Part of youth participation is about challenging traditional methods of decision-making or service delivery and putting power in the hands of those living with or in close connection to the issues they advocate for. It's also about making sure more underrepresented voices are heard.

Is this program right for your council?

The key to the success of this program in your community is ensuring it aligns to a real need. It is important to use existing research, team knowledge and trends to identify a problem and tailor the program accordingly. Listed below are several key considerations:

- An evidence base for why the SAS program is needed in the local community.
- Recognition of existing knowledge and resources within the council and community that may assist the delivery of the SAS program.
- Allocation of managerial time to support program implementation and staff supervision.
- A commitment from council and councillors to deliver the SAS program and to celebrate and promote the work and achievements within the wider community.
- Investigation of other potential partners to deliver the SAS program, ensuring that their values and ethos align with those of the council.
- Involvement of young people in program development, implementation and evaluation.
- Development of, or changes to, policy based on learnings and discussions with young people to ensure young LGBTIQA+ people are included.
- A communications plan to promote the program, educate the community about its importance and celebrate key successes.
- A process to ensure learnings are embedded along the way, making changes where necessary.
- A strategy to identify successful elements throughout the project and how these may be sustained when funding ceases.
- Input from others (like other councils and community organisations) about what activities have and haven't successfully engaged with and supported young LGBTIQA+ people.

Case Study: City of Whittlesea

Tahlia* joined the local Rainbow Group after learning more about it at [IDAHOBIT](#) (International day against homophobia, biphobia, interphobia & transphobia). Tahlia began attending the group in Term 4, 2019 along with her sister. (Note: Rainbow Group is run by the Baseline For Young People. This is the City of Whittlesea's Youth Services Team which provides programs, events and projects for young people).

Baseline staff noticed that Tahlia and her sister found it challenging to participate in a group environment, often preferring to sit together and rarely talked with the other group members. However, Tahlia did interact positively with staff and seemed to crave the opportunity to talk with staff about some of the significant changes that had happened within her family over recent years.

As COVID-19 restrictions came in from March 2020 and the Baseline Rainbow program transitioned to online programming for Term 2, Baseline staff became concerned for Tahlia as she didn't connect with the online program. During individual phone catch-ups with staff, Tahlia stated that she didn't like connecting with Rainbow through online platforms and said she much preferred the face-to-face interactions with others. Staff maintained a connection with Tahlia and her sister by continuing to include them in group texts and emails and continuing to send out activity packs and check-in through phone calls.

In between term 2 and term 3, Baseline staff undertook a consultation and review with all Rainbow young people to seek their feedback on what they were wanting from the Baseline staff going into term 3 and what they wanted to see from the Rainbow program. Consultation with Tahlia identified that she wanted to attend the online program independently of her sister – but required a bit more support to navigate the online platform being used. Staff set up a session to support Tahlia to work through the online platform. Subsequently, Baseline staff

have been thrilled to observe Tahlia engaging online with the Rainbow program independently of her sister. Tahlia has displayed confidence and has been enthusiastic in sharing and participating in group conversations, something that Tahlia had not been able to do when meeting in the face to face group before the COVID-19 restrictions.

Tahlia, through individual catch-ups with staff, has been able to share more about how talking with peers and adults was initially an overwhelming experience for her. She now feels more able to talk with Baseline staff and Rainbow people and is feeling more confident.

It is hoped that this period has provided the opportunity for Tahlia to feel more supported by and connected to staff and peers and that this provides Tahlia with a support base through which she can continue to grow and thrive through a very challenging period.

 *Name has been changed to maintain the young person's privacy.

Where to start

The SAS program has been run successfully in several councils, each time making a slight adaptation to reflect the uniqueness of the communities and geographical contexts in which it is run. There are some common guiding principles that will help steer your council through the process from establishment to implementation but it's important to consider the needs of the young people in your community and the capacities and resources within your council.

A good place to start is to establish who you'll be working with, based on the need you've identified in your community. Recognise the variety of human strengths, needs and experiences of those you'll be working with, from young people to parents and teachers. The program is built on relationships of respect and trust, rather than delivering a prescribed 'intervention', so it requires empathy and compassion. Establishing who will support you in this work, both inside and outside of council is critical to beginning a program such as SAS. On page 25 you'll find a list of key activities which outlines considerations for the establishment and delivery of the program.

Funding & costs

External funding

There are many grants available to local councils to provide financial support for programs created for young people. An increasing focus on young people and mental health in Victoria may offer new opportunities to apply for funding and work with new partners.

Youth Central is the Victorian Government's website for young people aged 12-25 and has numerous grants available for local councils in Victoria.

Youth Affairs Council Victoria offers 'Hey' Grants (Health Equal Youth) on an annual basis to local councils (and youth groups). They're a unique opportunity for mainstream and non-LGBTIQA+ based services to develop work and new activities which better target and include LGBTIQA+ young people and enhance their mental health and wellness.

The Victorian Government offers grants for local government youth programs which can be accessed via their website.

Rural and regional grants

In a Good Place is a national grants program funded by CCI Giving that provides support for community-driven initiatives that reduce social isolation, increase social participation and connectedness, and encourage people in rural, regional and remote communities who are at risk of or are experiencing mental health issues to seek help.

Internal funding

If no external funding is available, consider how to allocate funding within your youth services budget to deliver activities. How might you advocate to council through budget and business planning processes for funding to support this and other youth programs?

Cost considerations

It can be difficult to determine detailed information about project delivery requirements (like room hire and travel) as these will vary considerably from council to council, however, there are several cost considerations which have been outlined below.

- Youth Diversity Officer (project lead)
- Youth Services Officers and school wellbeing staff
- Management support to provide advocacy, staff supervision and a Chair of Youth Strategy
- Reference group (project governance group)
- Travel expenses
- Laptop and mobile phone
- Training budget
- Event and program delivery expenses

Build the team

Core team

When building your core team, the selection of a suitable project officer will play a key part in the success of the program. SAS is a person-led (rather than process-led) program and as such, the choice of team members is crucial. Key requirements of a project officer should include:

- Familiarity with the local government area and barriers to accessing services and programs (like public transport availability).
- Ability to develop a rapport with young people, families and professionals.
- Awareness of existing services and programs to support young LGBTIQA+ people and their families.
- Networking and partnership development skills.
- Project management skills.
- Evaluation skills.
- Knowledge and passion about issues facing young LGBTIQA+ people.
- Willingness to learn, listen and work with young people.
- Creativity for designing the service model, programs and events in collaboration with young people.
- Knowledge of current trends, issues, research, language and available services.
- Ability to deliver engaging presentations and advocate both internally and externally for young LGBTIQA+ people.

Consider mental health support for the young people in the program, from within your team, or externally. Core staff should be trained in working with young people and ideally have specialist training in youth mental health. If specialist training does not exist within the team consider how a youth support service may be utilised.

Intra-council connections

Make use of internal contacts such as finance, communications, human resources, Youth Services Team, Leadership Team and information technology staff. By linking the program across silos, you can create groups with a vested interest in the sustainability of the program.

Ensuring alignment of policies with other units can contribute to the sustainability of the program. At Glenelg Shire, the Health and Wellbeing Group is an internal task force responsible for cause days at the council, including IDAHOBIT and Wear it Purple Day.

The City of Whittlesea developed an internal 'Pride' working group. The group advocates and promotes Councils inclusive practices and works to engage staff to feel connected and empowered in an inclusive framework.

External organisations

Build relationships with schools, community and youth organisations. There are many ways of maximising school engagement with the program:

- Provide promotional material for display at the school.
- Meet with or present to students and staff (like talking at a school assembly).
- Facilitate programs within the school at lunchtime or during class time.
- Assist with policy development if no policies exist (include Safe Schools with this process).
- Identify yourself as a point of contact for LGBTIQA+-related information and issues.
- Run events that promote inclusion and acceptance.
- Identify key contacts within the school setting who can act as a champion and with whom you can develop a relationship. A champion may be in a wellbeing or leadership role, have an influential personality or be a proactive person who is passionate.
- Promote the benefits of LGBTIQA+ programs and information in terms of raising awareness for this cohort.

Building networks in the youth, queer and LGBTIQA+ health and wellbeing spaces will be invaluable in implementing the SAS program.

- Involvement of key stakeholders such as the Rainbow Network of Victoria and Safe Schools.
- Involvement of key stakeholders as enablers. An example of this is Safe Schools in conversations with education providers. The Safe Schools program helps schools foster a safe environment that is supportive and inclusive of LGBTIQA+ students. It is a program for principals, teachers and school communities.

Growing good practice

- Build connections with councils that have previously led this program and/or councils that are adapting it now.
- Consider developing a 'community of practice' for program officers across councils. During 2019-2020, VicHealth's Bright Futures Community of Practice supported the growth of good practice by providing regular opportunities for knowledge exchange, joint problem-solving and peer support across councils.

Marketing & promotion

Engage your council communications and marketing teams early to assist with all forms of communication. Together, you should build a comprehensive communication plan to promote the activities, training, events and groups delivered throughout the program. Develop strategies to celebrate and promote key successes of the program.

When developing a communication plan, it is important to consider the sensitive nature of this work and to ensure the privacy of the young people who attend events and groups. For example, a key consideration may be to avoid disclosing a program venue in communications. A better strategy may be to request that attendees contact the Youth Diversity Officer before an event.

It's important to have a good relationship with local media outlets to ensure they will respect the privacy of young people and uphold their obligation to get written consent to use photos for publication. Consider preparing a statement clearly which sets out the council's support of young LGTBI people in the community, should there be community backlash. A document containing frequently asked questions (FAQs) will be helpful for media spokespeople.

Your communication plan should consider other council LGBTIQA+ and youth strategies to ensure alignment of long term planning. How do the intended outcomes of the program align with priority areas of health and wellbeing plans?

Social media

Social media is an important channel for engaging young people. Consider setting up a Facebook page such as the [Be Ur Self](#) Facebook page set up by Cardinia Youth Services as it allows a greater reach and alternative form of communication for young people.

Platforms: Facebook, Instagram, TikTok
Main Council page/handle
Council Youth page/handle
Community groups page/handle
Local schools page/handle

Some key considerations when creating and managing social media pages:

- Work with the Council communications team to establish the intent of the page.
- Define a content strategy for page information.
- Posts should include evidence-based and best-practice information sourced from reputable organisations (like Minus 18, Rainbow Network Victoria and Safe Schools)
- Develop policies and procedures to support the continuation of the page and define responsibilities relating to page management.

Traditional media

Stories in school newsletters have a high readership with parents whilst posters for schools will be seen by students also. Stories in local print and radio can resonate well with a community, helping to build engagement through pride and identity.

SAS program

The SAS program is multi-faceted and offers five pillars of activity that work together to ensure young people feel supported in their homes, schools and communities.

In-school and after-school social support and advocacy groups

- In-school programs can be delivered within public, private or alternative education settings with the support of school wellbeing and leadership staff.
- After-school programs can be delivered from halls, libraries, youth centres and/or neighbourhood houses. Programs are delivered throughout the school term with transport being provided to young people from across the shire or council to ensure their safety and access to activities

Provision of online resources and anonymous access to support

- Online resources and private messaging can be achieved through a Facebook page.
- The Facebook page must be regularly monitored in order to respond to queries and requests for support promptly. This role should be allocated to one worker who is trained and knowledgeable about LGBTIQA+ issues and local referral pathways.
- Paid advertising can be considered to reach more people, as well as sharing the page with other relevant social media outlets that young people access. (like the Council Youth Services Facebook page, the Rainbow Network, other community and youth organisations).

Parent education and support

For young people to feel safe and supported at home, support and education for parents of young people who identify as LGBTIQA+ is needed. This can be achieved through online

training, support groups (in-person or online), education workshops or one-to-one support (over the phone or in-person).

Education beyond the family

- To increase the acceptance and inclusion of young LGBTIQA+ people at school and within the community, a range of education workshops can be delivered to different target audiences about the issues faced by this cohort.
- Proper training of management, youth sector professionals and teachers will ensure that they are capable and confident to engage young LGBTIQA+ young people and provide them with accurate information about available support services. Education workshops can also provide information about how their service can be more inclusive, for example, how they collect personal information on forms.
- Mandatory training for service staff can negatively impact attitudes and learning. Involuntary participants can sidetrack or shut down conversations, interrupting learning and frustrating others. Consider making training optional.
- Effective storytelling can educate as well as entertain participants.

Events

Well-attended events are the key to the success of the program. To achieve this, you need young people to inform the decisions about what events to run and how to run them. Establish what the purpose of the event is going to be. Each event may aim to do one or more of the following:

- Promote the inclusion and acceptance of young LGBTIQA+ people in their community, workplace and/or school.
- Celebrate diversity and socialise with LGBTIQA+ peers and allies in a safe and fun environment.
- Distribute LGBTIQA+-specific resources and information to young people, parents, professionals, community members.
- Raise funds to run additional local events for young LGBTIQA+ people or statewide support organisations (like Minus18).

- Promote the Safe and Supported program within the community.
- Enable key community leaders/decision-makers to engage with LGBTIQA+ young people and hear about the issues they face within the local community (perhaps through councillor attendance at pride formals or pride marches)
- Raise awareness of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia in the community.
- Introduce young people to other local support services/youth workers.

Other LGBTIQA+ events
- [Wear It Purple Day](#) – students set-up a stall at their school during lunchtime to display and distribute LGBTIQA+-specific information and resources. Wear It Purple Day is an annual LGBTIQA+-awareness day in Australia.
- Pride formal – [Be Ur Self](#) group participants hosted a Pride formal in partnership with the FReeZA committee (young people organising drug, smoke and alcohol-free events).
- [Pride march](#) – can be attended by either the after-school group or by the council.
- [IDAHOBIT](#) flag-raising – takes place at local secondary schools and Council Civic Centre. IDAHOBIT is an international day against homophobia, biphobia, interphobia and transphobia.

Key activities

Establishment

❏ **Establish a steering committee.** You may wish to utilise the expertise of your council's Youth Strategy Reference Group or other existing committees such as Communities that Care, School Focused Youth Service, Communities for Children Plus, Local Youth Network or Local Learning and Employment Group.

❏ **Write a project plan** (with help from the steering committee). The plan should consider the program outline and proposal, session development, budget, risk assessment, venue bookings etc.

❏ **Establish sources of funding.** Apply for grants if necessary.

❏ **Establish an internal team**.

❏ **Engage partners**. Make contact with local youth services and community agencies.

❏ **Marketing and promotion**. Develop a communication strategy. Anticipate 6-8 weeks of marketing and promotion through online platforms using both Council and Youth Services social pages and websites.

❏ **Resources planning.** Plan resources required for in-school and after-school groups, online resources and for parent and council education.

Delivery

❏ **In-school and after-school programs.**

❏ **Online resources** to enable anonymous access to support.

❏ **Growing good practice.** Provide learning and networking opportunities for program staff, for example by connecting with other councils who are also adapting the program or by creating a 'community of practice'.

❏ **Parent education and support**. Deliver training or education. This may be in-person or online.

❏ **Education for council employees and community**. Workshops for different target audiences.

❏ **Wrap up**.

Outcomes & Reporting

Outcomes

LGBTIQA+ young people engaged in the SAS initiatives have reported improved mental health and increased connection with support services, education, family, peers and the wider community. They have also reported decreased feelings of discrimination, isolation and loneliness.

Outcomes & achievements from Cardinia Shire Council

Cardinia Shire Council co-designed the original SAS program in conjunction with local schools, youth service providers and young people. The core program was made up of five key initiatives including in-school and after-school social support and advocacy groups, online resources, parent education, community education and events. Over time, Cardinia Shire Council grew its LGBTIQA+ inclusion policies and offering, and prides itself on the following achievements carried out in the 2018-2019 period:

- Be Ur Self program, a social support group for LGBTIQA+ young people 12-21 years old with transport being provided to the whole shire to ensure young people have access.
- The establishment of a lunchtime advocacy program at Pakenham Secondary College, focusing on mental health and LGBTIQA+ inclusion.
- An LGBTIQA+ Internal Action Team within Cardinia Shire Council to progress inclusiveness for LGBTIQA+ staff and residents in Cardinia. The group comprises members from most departments and has adopted 15 key recommendations that have been achieved before the end of the year.
- The inaugural raising of the Pride Flag at the Cardinia Shire Council Civic Centre to celebrate IDAHOBIT Day 2018 with a community event.

- The showcasing of the 'Marcus' short film and workshop to educate the community about Trans* people.
- Pride Formal 2018 a great success with over 145 young people from across the south-east in attendance.
- The delivery of LGBTIQA+ Inclusive Practice and Language training across council and other local schools and organisations.

Reporting

"In order to achieve program sustainability, we need to present our evaluation data (to council) and show that we've achieved what we've set out to do" Host council

Reporting is essential to help monitor the effectiveness of the program and to ensure funding is allocated where it can be best utilised. Consideration should be given to data collection according to the needs of council and any external funding bodies (if required). A council plan or funding body guidelines should ideally guide reporting.

There are several ways that the progress and success of the program can be monitored and measured:

- Attendance records of program events.
- Evaluations, mid-term reviews and ongoing feedback.
- Staff observation and facilitator debrief sessions.

Evaluations need to be implemented at the beginning of the program to ensure that the program effectiveness is accurately measured.

Use a range of different methods to evaluate, review and seek feedback and ensure that it is inclusive to all young people of all abilities.

Adaptations

We know that community-based programs can't be standardised in the same way for all councils. What worked in one place may not work in other places. What worked at one time may stop working as the context changes. Whilst it's important to remain 'true' to the core purpose and principles of the program, a continuous process of learning and adaptation is required to ensure that the program continues to create a positive impact in your community.

The onset of the COVID-19 lockdowns in early 2020 forced the rapid adaptation of programs by the City of Whittlesea and Glenelg Shire councils. Many parts of the program successfully moved online however there were considerations in doing so.

Glenelg Shire adaptations

Glenelg Shire's Rainbow program adapted to go online, running weekly sessions. Glenelg Shire also held online forums which were inclusive to all participants.

IDAHOBIT day was adapted and ran online as a forum. Considerations were given to young people who have limited access to online and tech support. The transition to online program delivery was challenging for a number of the more vulnerable participants. Considerations need to be made on how to support or maintain engagement of young people who may not engage online.

Glenelg Shire adapted to delivering the parent/carer and professional workshops online. Considerations need to include the privacy of young people, child safety standards, what platform is more effective for the type of program/forum/activity.

City of Whittlesea adaptations

The City of Whittlesea's Rainbow group adapted to go online running weekly sessions using [Microsoft Teams](#). Participants were sent out a pack of resources that were used throughout the

sessions. The sessions included guest speakers, creative art activities, quizzes, brain teasers and discussion-based activities. To begin with, young people were very active and involved. As the sessions progressed, the drop-off in participants increased and participants' mental health concerns became greater due to COVID-19 and associated stresses.

As a result, the City of Whittlesea went back to the group to get feedback on the weekly sessions. They found that half the group were still interested in participating online. These participants felt the need to change the time of the sessions to fit in around home learning and to allow time for those who were still attending school to travel home. The session was changed to a weekly one-hour session and was flexible enough to allow young people to come in and out of sessions as required. Many of the participants found it hard to engage in online sessions and expressed a desire to wait until the group returned to face to face sessions. Those participants requested that staff keep in contact with them via occasional phone check-ins.

"I think Rainbow Online works best when there is a presenter, like when the library came. It works best when there is someone doing most of the talking. Group conversations don't work well with everyone talking on top of each other". Quote from a participant in the SAS program, City of Whittlesea.

The City of Whittlesea also ran an IDAHOBIT forum online through Zoom. The Pride group adapted the 2020 IDAHOBIT celebrations by partnering with councils in the northern regions of Victoria for a virtual flag-raising ceremony. This was complemented with an online campaign to highlight councils' support for the day.

The City of Whittlesea adapted the professional workshop online and had great uptake. The feedback from participants was positive and additional online workshops were requested. The parent workshops have also been adapted to go online.

Project close

Communications to young people

- Inform young people and parents as soon as the end date for the support period is known.
- Do not accept referrals for one-to-one support four weeks before closure date (link young people directly into a service which can be medium-term).
- Ensure that referrals to support services are done in a timely manner. This will allow the person to be supported to engage with the new worker (internal or external).

Reporting to council and funding partners

At the completion of the SAS project, it's advisable to develop a report presenting the outcomes achieved and the relationships that were developed as a result. Highlight internal relationships that developed across silos throughout the program, in addition to community relationships.

The use of evaluation data will become a key strategy in building a case for the program to become a budgeted part of the council's regular service delivery. This will help to ensure the long term sustainability of the program within council.

Opportunities for young people beyond program close

The SAS program opens many new opportunities for the participants who engage with it. Encouraging your participants' confidence beyond the life of the program can have far-reaching benefits. The City of Whittlesea offers the following pathways for young people:

- Run the Rainbow program
- Attend Pride March
- Be involved in 'Wear it Purple' and IDAHOBIT events

Other services for young people include:

- [Minus 18](#)
- [Queerspace](#)
- [Ygender](#)
- [Rainbow network](#)
- [Rainbow health Victoria](#)
- [Drummond Street](#)

As of August 2020, The City of Whittlesea is developing an online platform which will contribute to the sustainability of the SAS school component of the program. The platform will allow schools to access a step-by-step guide covering student engagement and implementation of an LGBTIQA+ group within their school. Schools will be required to partner with the City of Whittlesea to support the roll-out of the program.

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www.baselinewhittlesea.com

Baseline for Young People's Rainbow group took part in the Clothesline Project for the Week Without Violence campaign designing t-shirts that were displayed at our youth space, City of Whittlesea.
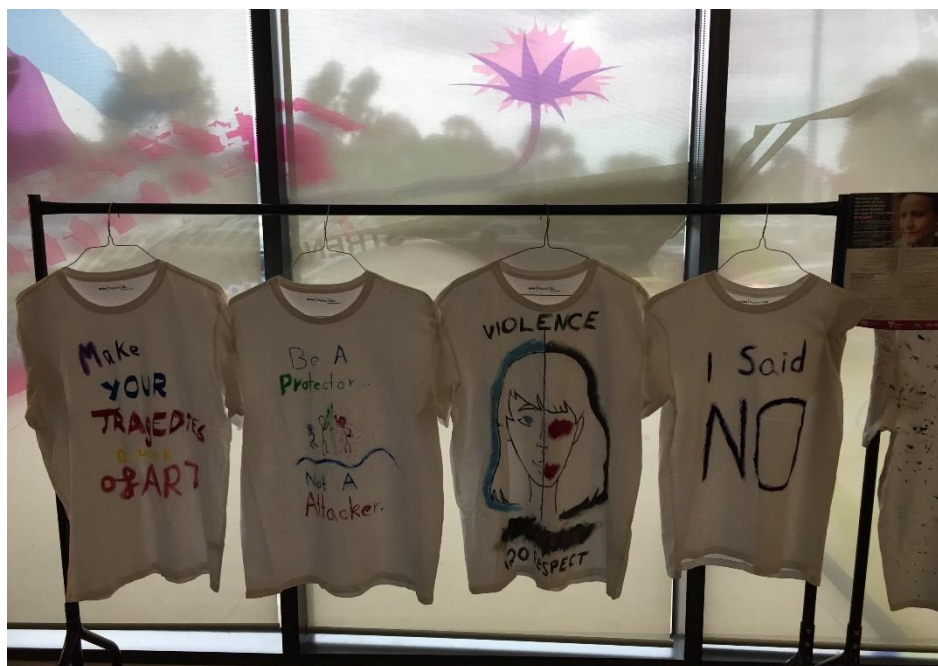
Baseline for Young People's Rainbow group brainstorming some fun group activities, City of Whittlesea.

The City of Whittlesea, Baseline for Young People's Rainbow group doing a creative art activity making dream catchers, City of Whittlesea.

The City of Whittlesea, Baseline for Young People's Rainbow group doing a creative art activity making gods eyes, City of Whittlesea.

As part of IDAHOBIT day, The City of Whittlesea, Baseline for Young People's Rainbow group and local secondary schools painted tiles that will be installed as a large art piece in a community centre in the City of Whittlesea.

City of Whittlesea, Pride march 2020, City of Whittlesea.

Some Skittles crew at Portland's Upwelling Festival Parade. Glenelg Shire Council.

Six Skittles participants were lucky enough to receive haircuts and colours from the lovely staff at Gazebo Hair, Portland. Glenelg Shire Council.

Skittles participants holding their completed mosaics made to acknowledge IDAHOBIT. Glenelg Shire Council.