

# Rainbow Communities Tasmania Inc.

## Annual Report 2021



### Introduction

I am happy to report that the work in returning the organisation to its resources, original terms of reference and objectives as a state peak advocacy organisation is now complete. The funding guidelines and governance have now established that our resources and objectives in protecting and providing a voice to the LGBTIQ+ communities locally, nationally and internationally are re-dedicated to this critical purpose and intent. This has required restoring the Application and Guidelines for RCT Inc. funding to their original composition.

Our membership has substantially increased and the Secretary, Brian Doran has established an active group of Friends who support our active pursuit of issues that oppose any discrimination and improve our position as acknowledged, respected and celebrated members of the our local, national and international communities.

We are very grateful to Jo Goodman who as a dedicated volunteer has restored and renewed the Rainbow Communities Tasmania Website at <https://www.rainbowtas.org/>

Jo has been a longstanding executive member of RCT Inc. Her restoration of the website has been a major work. Thank you Jo.

Unfortunately during the periods of rejection and compliance of our advocacy role and the funding that had been supplied for specific application to social issues, some considerable amounts of funds that had been raised through RCT's Coming Out Proud Program and the League of Gentlefellows catered, safe-space, social functions were misappropriated to areas not intended as recipients of fundraising. This lack of compliance is regrettable, but is now at an end as we return to the following projects being funded by RCT Inc.

- Suicide prevention
- Racist-based homophobia
- Support for SOGI (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity) international communities
- LGBTIQ+ youth and elderly communities
- Engaging councils and organisations in LGBTIQ+ cultural awareness, anti-discrimination training and local programs of support
- Safe-Space social functions and sponsorship
- During covid we have increased our activities through virtual meetings and advocacy activity. This has included the following activities:
  - Rural Week LGBTI+ Cultural Awareness Training for medical students in five regions, developing a gay-friendly medical model
  - Reviving the Coming Out Proud Program in several municipal areas commencing with Kingborough and the Huon Valley Areas
  - Support and engagement of SOGI people and the UN IE (United Nations Independent

Experts) in the 72 Countries that execute, imprison, persecute and torture them

- Engagement in the religious freedom debate following the marriage equality debate with advocacy support for the sections of the LGBTIQ+ communities that took the brunt of the homophobia that increased in the general communities at every level.

### **RCT Inc. Submission to UN SOGI Independent Expert Victor Madrigal-Berloz**

In conjunction with the work of the Oxford University Refugees Centre on Forced Migration Review - Issue 42 - April - Sexual Orientation Gender Identity and the Protection of Forced Migrants

<<http://www.fmreview.org/sogim>>, RCT Inc. President Julian Punch made a submission to the UN SOGI Independent Expert (UN IE), Victor Madrigal-Berloz.

The Review details that while LGBTIQ+ people form on average 10% of the population, in the forced migration populations it may reach twice this figure. It also details post traumatic health disorder (PTSD) in this population caused by the significant mental health pressures of their situation.

*RCT Inc. has developed a national involvement in the 72 Countries that execute, imprison, torture and persecute SOGI people.*

Julian Punch responded to an invitation from a SOGI person by making seven visits to Bangladesh in order to learn about the situation, gain an understanding of the issues that these people face and to learn how to work with SOGI forced immigrants and their daily contact support people. It is noted that these people are in constant fear for their lives, unable to escape their country of origin, nor able to openly share a relationship with another person of the same sex.

Daily we are hearing/sharing the distress of the fear and reality of forced arranged marriages of SOGI people to an 'opposite' sex person and the honour killings by family members of their SOGI relatives following failure of these forced relationships. It has also led to understanding the development of a Code of Safety and Security for anyone working in this area. We have seen breaks in these practices by careless workers lead to honour killing beheadings and executions.

As a consequence, every SOGI person from these countries observes a total secrecy about their personal or family details, also meaning that they are unable to form open relationships or meet for social purposes. It is also impossible to process humanitarian or protection visas in their home countries given life-threatening retaliations.

Human Rights Commissioner, Chris Sidoti has, from start of our visits, supported our fundamental commitment to this international endeavour. The failure of Australia to recognise our international

commitment to the UN Human Rights Convention on Asylum Seekers and the particular protocol for SOGI people, is a gross abrogation of the Convention which continues the awful oppression of SOGI people and puts Australia into association with the countries that are in denial of basic human rights.

Our unique involvement and work with SOGI people:

- Assists them in their country of origin to develop and understand their sexuality
- Assists with humanitarian visas to Australia
- Assists them to flee their country of origin (pathway to freedom) as required for their situation as refugees, e.g. UN humanitarian visas, student visas, partnership visas etc.
- Assists them, if they reach Australia, to gain protection visas.

All this work and the lessons learned have led to developing and supporting our submission to the to UN SOGI Independent Expert, Victor Madrigal-Berloz. Our submission is underpinned by our contact in the 72 countries forming peak consultants developing detailed proposals as follows.

**You can support our submission to the UN IE by email to OHCHR-IE Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity at the following email address: [ohchr-ie-sogi@un.org](mailto:ohchr-ie-sogi@un.org)**

1. RCT Inc. first basic request is that ***the UN Independent Expert recommends that every UN Country Team has a designated SOGI focal point (Officer) who is named and promoted on the UN country website, with contact details provided***
2. Secondly from our growing experience we also want to request that ***the IE devote one of his periodic reports to the Human Rights Council or to the General Assembly to the issue of international protection for persons who experience, or are at risk of, persecution on the basis of their SOGI. The report could draw on the experiences of those SOGI people who are in touch with RCT Inc. The report could examine***
  - Why international protection is required
  - What the responsibilities of UN entities, like UNHCR, are
  - What the responsibilities of individual States are.
3. Thirdly, understanding that the IE also has a function of following up on individual complaints, he 'transmits [urgent appeals and letters of allegation](#) to States with regard to cases of violence and discrimination against persons on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity'.

While we understand that this is a subject of dangerous and life threatening implications for the complainant, given that the IE can't transmit an urgent appeal or letter of allegation without naming the person at risk and yet naming the person, can increase the risk immeasurably. From our experience we would request ***the IE seek additional guidance as to how this function can be exercised in the context of SOGI where the risks are so great if persons are identified.***

- What avenues are there to perform this function without identifying individuals at risk?
- What re-assurance can be given to complainants that complaining to the IE will not make their situation worse?
- A guidance note that addresses these issues would be of assistance to the individuals concerned and would also assist the IE to perform his mandate more effectively. In normal life the issue of 'sanctuary' is critical.
- We would also add that this is the situation that all SOGI people seeking Humanitarian or Protection visas face in their home countries as well as 'honour' killings' in their planning and execution cross over national boundaries.
- It is also an issue of importance in the training and credentialing of anybody working with SOGI people from the 72 countries in question. In our organisation I am responsible independently and secretly for the SOGI work in the 72 Countries. We have had some instances where information on SOGI people has leaked out of 'diplomatic' International organisations with terrible consequences.

4. We have discussed in detail the position and mandate of the Independent SOGI Expert as defined on his website and the video to SOGI people we are in contact with, that they are of necessity legalistic and the video western stylised and very difficult, if not impossible, to comprehend for the standard SOGI person. ***They need some shorter, more readable version that people from different language bases can understand in their required pathway to freedom.***

The work of RCT Inc. in this nationally significant work has been assisted and supported by the Pride Foundation in Sydney with offered funding to establish a peer support group. Following this offer, RCT Inc. and the Tasmanian University Student Association (TUSA) propose to collaborate to create a peer-led support group for LGBTQIA+ refugees and international students at the University of Tasmania.

We note that although international students are a broad category, in practice it would be difficult to differentiate students who have come to Australia under a student visa to flee persecution from those who have only come to study.

We also note the importance of privacy to students whose families and home authorities importantly are not aware of their LGBTQIA+ identity. As a result of this, the importance of informed consent and autonomy of students to choose to what level they are involved will be imperative. The student-led peer-support group would need to be established in consultation with Working It Out Tasmania, the Hobart Migrant Centre, the Refugee Legal Service and any other relevant community organisations to ensure cultural sensitivity and privacy. Depending on the amount of student interest found in Stage One (see below), TUSA will facilitate RCT Inc. in identifying interested students, as well as identifying potential facilitators for the peer-led support group.

## **Finally**

I commend this Annual Report to the members and friends of Rainbow Communities Tasmania Inc. for endorsement at its Annual General Meeting on 13 March 2022, to be held virtually in respect of the Covid 19 conditions.

I wish especially to thank RCT Inc. members, Tony Furmage and Ted Gray, who guided the Committee back to matters of financial and objective compliance to where we now stand today.

I also wish to thank the number of members & friends of RCT Inc. who have been a vital part of the important advocacy projects being implemented today. They are reliant on the self-determination and initiative of people committed to the survival and progress of our communities, sometimes in desperate situations that still exist, from organisations and ideologies that resist our community's full inclusion and equity

**Julian S. Punch – President, Rainbow Communities Tasmania Inc.**

13 March 2022