



Rainbow Communities Tasmania Inc.

Annual Report 2023-2024

Introduction

I am happy to report that, as a state peak advocacy organisation, the work done by Rainbow Communities Tasmania Incorporated (RCT Inc.) in returning the organisation to its resources, original terms of reference and objectives is now complete. We are a self-determined, unfunded, fearless LGBTIQ+ advocacy body without fear or favour to government, or funding organisations, as we are not dependant on them.

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 rededicated 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 thanks to the Secretary/Treasurer, Brian Doran, has established an active group of friends who support our pursuit of issues that oppose any discrimination and improve our position, as acknowledged, respected and celebrated members of 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 long-standing executive member of RCT Inc. Her restoration of the website has been a major work and is being used by many local gay, regional and international gay people requiring information or assistance and for promoting their initiatives. Thank you, Jo.

Unfortunately, during the period of rejection and compliance of our advocacy role, and the considerable funding that had been given for specific applications to social issues; some considerable amounts of funding were misappropriated for areas not intended in the fundraising of RCT Inc. through the Coming Out Proud Program and the League of Gentlefellows catered Safe Space social functions. This lack of compliance is regrettable but is now at an end as we return to the following projects funded by RCT Inc. which are in essence self-funded or supported by members' personal contributions and volunteer commitments.

Suicide and Ideation Prevention

The RCT Inc. Executive made a submission at a Hearing of the State Government Inquiry Into Bullying and Discrimination. While recommending to the inquiry a proactive approach to eliminating the fundamental causes of homophobia, which are structured and funded in many of our organisations, we proposed these are the changes the inquiry needs to identify and either eradicate or promote positive policy changes in their place.

The Human Rights Legislation and the Tasmanian Anti-Discrimination Act, as well as the state government public service 'Managing Diversity Program' are key to positive administration of managing diversity in the state. Homophobic discrimination and hatred by the churches directed to LGBTIQ+ people is key to the higher incidences of suicide and ideation in Tasmania. This is illustrated in the Latrobe University research paper *' [LGBTQA+ Mental Health and Suicidity Tasmania Briefing Paper](https://opal.latrobe.edu.au/articles/report/LGBTQA_Mental_Health_and_Suicidity_Tasmania_Briefing_Paper) ', which illustrates that suicidality and mental ill-health are serious concerns that impact especially the SOGI (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity) populations.

* https://opal.latrobe.edu.au/articles/report/LGBTQA_Mental_Health_and_Suicidity_Tasmania_Briefing_Paper/26242028?file=49656444

Although some are disproportionately affected, LGBTQA+ people are recognised in numerous commonwealth, state and territory mental health and suicide prevention strategies or action plans. However, LGBTQA+ people continue to face barriers to accessing affirming healthcare and to date, limited comprehensive data exists on the mental health and healthcare experiences of LGBTQA+ people. This briefing paper outlines findings from three major surveys of LGBTQA+ people and aims to:

- Highlight the extent and nature of mental ill-health and suicidality among LGBTQA+ young people and adults in Tasmania.
 - Explore the factors that can put people at greater risk of suicide or mental ill-health, as well as those that reduce their risk of suicide.
 - Examine mental health service engagement and preferences among LGBTQA+ people in Tasmania.
 - Using the latest data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, draw comparisons between the experiences of LGBTQA+ people in Tasmania compared to other jurisdictions in Australia, and where possible, LGBTQA+ people in Tasmania being higher than the general population.
- Recent suicide attempts were also more likely to be reported by participants from Tasmania (7.8%) and Queensland (7.1%), followed by Western Australia (6.2%), Australian Capital Territory (5.7%), Victoria (4.5%), South Australia (4.2%), and New South Wales (4.1%). (ABS: 2022-2022).

Intense homophobia is still practiced in Catholic and some religious schools nationally, which has led to high rates of self-harm and suicide in these schools and out into the community. Now retired Tasmanian Archbishop, Julian Porteous, has encouraged a religious code in Catholic schools that promotes LGBTIQ+ students as “immoral, unnatural and decadent”. The Archbishop achieved a state government exemption to exclude gay teachers from Catholic schools, which stands to this day. While he failed to gain an exemption from the Tasmanian Anti-Discrimination Act (TADA) to exclude gay students, he still persists.

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) strongly opposed same-sex marriage in a referendum and encouraged Catholics in Australia to do the same. The position of the Australian bishops, some of whom are gay, was demonstrated during the Referendum on Same Sex Marriage. In June 2015, the ACBC distributed a booklet entitled, 'Don't Mess with Marriage', which was distributed to about 12,000 Tasmanian families with children attending Catholic schools. The booklet stated that same-sex partners don't deserve equal recognition, and that same-sex-attracted people are not "whole" people. This is amply demonstrated in the recent published book, 'In The Closet of the Vatican' (by French author, Frédéric Martel, 2019) which illustrates most senior clerics in the Roman Catholic church who have vociferously attacked homosexuality are themselves gay, as well eighty per cent of priests working at the Vatican, although they are not necessarily sexually active. It is claimed in the 570-page book, which Martel spent four years researching, is a “startling account of corruption and hypocritical homophobia at the heart of the Vatican”.

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/feb/21/in-the-closet-of-the-vatican-by-frederic-martel-review>

Through this conflict in religious private schools, the response of LGBTIQ+ students and their families and friends has been significant in that they have remonstrated/demonstrated with their children against the destructive religious codes that vilify gay students, and developed positive responses to the negative codes, especially for trans and intra sexual people in the schools.

The Australian bishops are also rejected by Pope Francis, who approved a landmark ruling to allow Roman Catholic priests to administer blessings to same-sex couples. While few white Catholic priests now serve in Australia, black priests from African countries are filling their places in Catholic schools, while Asian ordained and in-the-main conservative priests come to Australia on 457 visas that are granted by the government to the church. Given that these priests are subtly threatened that their visas will be subject to review if they do not follow the bishop's conservative moral code, this was of concern to the inquiry.

RCT Inc. Practices Local, Regional, International Self-determined Action

RCT Inc. is an organisation operating locally, regionally, and internationally, committed to the wellbeing of the LGBTIQ+ communities in the state of Tasmania.

We are committed to advocacy by self-determination of the LGBTIQ+ communities rather than charismatic posturing by select individuals. Every person who has a diverse sexual preference is subject to discrimination and bullying by a dominant heterosexual view of sexuality in the general community. 'Coming out' as being sexually diverse, is in practice something that our community members must face with parents, family and other community members, as opposed to the presumption that they are heterosexual.

RCT Inc. works in the 76 countries that - contrary to the UN Convention on Asylum (Section 9) - prosecute, execute, torture, and persecute LGBTIQ+ peoples. RCT Inc. both visits and supports LGBTIQ+ people in these countries as well as the expatriate LGBTIQ+ people from these countries now living in Australia. While arranged cultural persecution and discrimination including arranged marriages and honour killings are illegal in Australia, they are not discouraged or prosecuted as they should be.

Opposing Racist-Based Homophobia

Through the SOGI Independent Advisor, we are appealing to the UN for access and support in these countries in order for LGBTIQ+ people to seek safety asylum in more secure countries, and for safety in embassies or UN offices. There has been exposure of gay people who've sought assistance in these embassies and UN offices, and in some of these cases gay people have been executed.

In Longley Tasmania, my partner and I experienced seven years of hate speech and crime from a neighbour as we daily walked our dogs down the Huon Road. It only stopped after a complaint to the Tasmanian Anti-Discrimination Commissioner was addressed in an Tasmanian Anti-Discrimination Act (TADA) tribunal, and a decision that compensated us and found the respondent guilty of hate speech and crime was handed down.

Despite court restraint orders, the Tasmanian police did very little to protect us until a courageous Kingston officer, Julian Purrand, to his own detriment, stood outside the tribunal hearings in full uniform to give evidence of the hate speech and crime outlined in our case. We were awarded compensation for the hate speech but nothing regarding the hate acts of violence against us, as there was no hate crime legislation (Anti-Discrimination Tribunal of Tasmania cases M/2014/3866 and M/2014/589 Julian Punch and Brian Doran v. Benedict King).

We have proposed to the inquiry that discrimination and bullying in Tasmanian Schools is endemic because the structures allow it to happen. Students bully and discriminate against one another because they are not taught to value diversity. While the Public Service Commissioner has initiated a program of reporting and evaluating managing diversity on an annual basis in the state departments and public institutions, this not valued or managed in many private institutions.

The inquiry could make a valuable contribution by exposing this as a strategic cause of bullying and discrimination of both staff and students in the schools. Establishing cultural awareness training by diverse minority groups should be an imperative that is insisted on and evaluated on an annual basis.

The institutionalised discrimination by the hierarchy in private religious schools needs to be condemned and the guilty clergy punished, same as for the endemic sexual abuse they have hidden and condoned over so many years. Representation to the Vatican Embassy through the Papal Nuncio should be initiated regarding schismatic clergy in Tasmania and their connection to suicide and self-harm in the LGBTIQA+ communities. The Apostolic Nunciature to Australia is the diplomatic post of the Holy See, whose representative is called the Apostolic Nuncio to Australia with the rank of an ambassador. The Nunciature is in Canberra. Archbishop Charles Balvo was appointed Nuncio in January 2022 by Pope Francis.

To make submissions to the Papal Nuncio in Australia, you may contact the Apostolic Nunciature at:

2 Vancouver Street
RED HILL ACT 2603
Phone: +61 02 6295 3876
Email: na.australia@diplomat.va
Fax: +61 02 6295 3690

Institutionalised homophobia and lack of valuing diversity is a state-based, costly cause of discrimination and bullying in Tasmanian Schools. RCT Inc. offered to contribute to solutions proposed and planned in the final report.

- We engage in supporting persecuted people through the process of disavowal of religious LGBTIQA+, 'immoral unnatural and decadent' paranoia, and to accompany them through leaving their families, countries or organisations to a safe country or environment.
- Barrister and migration lawyer, Kim Heap from WPM Lawyers, has been a marvellous pro-bono migration officer assisting people from the 76 countries gaining Australian protection visas for settlement here.
- We are interested in establishing a CRISP program to enable providing essential support to those seeking resettlement once they reach Australia, but this will require a strong LGBTIQA+ cultural awareness and a safety code to protect forced migrants.
- This is now an active international SOGI network of silent forced asylum seekers from an increasing number of the 76 countries that persecute our people.
- RCT Inc. is now a member of the Virtual LGBTQI Resettlement and Settlement Roundtable Agenda established by the Department of Home Affairs. Our agenda is developed by the international group of forced SOGI asylum seekers around their issues of settlement or resettlement.
- RCT Inc. is also supporting gay people fleeing these countries on the asylum road, which often takes years.

Ending the Terrible Abuse of Conversion Therapy

RCT Inc. has supported several people in their meetings with former Tasmanian Archbishop, Julian Porteous. Despite supporting these people in their matters of concern including sexual abuse by the clergy, we have raised the issue of “conversion therapy” that he supports for LGBTIQ+ people. We have stated to Mr Porteous the terrible damage, encompassing cases of self-harm and suicide caused in our communities by his protection and subsidy of this archaic practice, including his enforced moral code in all Catholic schools and his insistence that that LGBTIQ+ sexuality is immoral, unnatural and decadent.

Julian Porteous has pushed back against the Tasmanian Law Reform Institute (TLRI) publication of a 300-page report that suggested a ban on conversion therapy in the Australian island state of Tasmania. Advocates have argued that if the practice is not banned, Tasmania will become a magnet for those using these long-discredited techniques. Calls for a ban on conversion therapy in Tasmania are causing a disagreement between the archdiocese and human rights experts. As well, conversion therapy is being resisted by students and their parents in planned protests.

In Tasmania a targeted campaign led by Julian Porteous and including Christian churches, Islamic mosques, and some Liberal MP's, is being run against plans to ban conversion therapy. In his lectures, Porteous speaks against same-sex love and marriages. We are engaged with a colleague, Peter Confeggi, in our endeavours in this area.

While Tasmania's government has made a public apology for those convicted under the state's former anti-LGBTIQ+ laws, there are calls for a financial redress scheme for victims of the previous legislation. Tasmania was the last Australian state to remove laws that made homosexual practices illegal, decades after some mainland states removed similar laws. Peter Confeggi has represented Rainbow Communities Tasmania Inc. in the LGBTIQ+ group in the fight with other advocacy groups for legislation to ban the practice. Peter Confeggi has engaged with Equity Tasmania and Working it Out to work towards the banning of conversion therapy in state law.

Working in the 76 Countries that Execute, Imprison, Persecute and Torture LGBTIQ+ People

RCT Inc. has developed a national involvement in the 76 countries that execute, imprison, torture and persecute SOGI diverse people. The 1951 Asylum Convention and its 1967 Protocol Guidelines on International Protection No. 9: based on Sexual Orientation and/or Gender Identity within the context of Article 1A(2) of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees*, ++, are the key legal documents that form the basis of our work.

*<http://www.fmreview.org/sogi>

++<https://www.unhcr.org/media/unhcr-guidelines-international-protection-no-9-claims-refugee-status-based-sexual-orientation>

Following an invitation from a SOGI person and seven visits to Bangladesh to learn of the situation, and with the support of UN commissioner, Chris Sidoti, a comprehensive understanding of the issues that these people face and how to work with SOGI forced immigrants from these countries and the daily contacts supporting them, it is noted that they 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.

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 this practice lead to the execution and honour killing beheadings by careless workers. Every SOGI person from these countries observes a total secrecy about their personal or family details. It also means that they are unable to form open relationships or meet for social purposes.

Given life-threatening retaliation, it is also impossible to process humanitarian or protection visas in their home countries. UN commissioners, Chris Sidoti and Brian Burdekin have supported us from the start of our visits and 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, has meant no support for SOGI asylum seekers and Australia's denial of them receiving permanent protection visas, as well as punishing them and placing them in detention and then later transferring to overseas detention centres on Christmas, Nauru and Manus Islands.

Our unique involvement and work with SOGI people:

- Assists them as SOGI people in their country of origin to develop and understand their sexuality.
- Assists with humanitarian visas to Australia.
- Assists them in fleeing 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 to gain protection visas if they reach Australia.

Gay Hate Crime Review and Reform

Julian Punch and Brian Doran of RCT Inc. turned to the state's Ant-Discrimination Tribunal after enduring seven years of hatred, violence and abuse by former neighbour, Benedict King, after several restraint orders against their attacker had failed. This resulted in an Ant-Discrimination Tribunal decision that ordered Julian and Brian be compensated for homophobic harassment and vilification, and to be awarded \$6,000 in compensation. They were unable to be compensated for the physical violence and streetcar driving attacks.

After the Ant-Discrimination Commissioner was unable to enforce the decision, the item was registered in the Supreme Court and a caveat on Mr King's family home was taken out in the Tasmanian Land Deeds and Titles Office. Seven years later, in February 2023, Julian and Brian finally received the \$6,000 compensation payment, plus interest.

Levels of mental ill-health and suicidality are very high among both LGBTQA+ adults and young people in Tasmania. Lifetime suicidal ideation was prevalent for 79.0% of LGBTQA+ adults and 88.8% of LGBTQA+ young people, with 48.1% of adults and 63.1% of young people reporting recent suicidal ideation. 36.7% of LGBTQA+ adults and 32.7% of LGBTQA+ young people have attempted suicide at least once in their lifetime, and 8.2% of adults and 11.6% of young people have reported a recent suicide attempt. Poorer mental health or social well-being indicators were noted among trans and gender diverse individuals, those from multicultural backgrounds, and individuals with a disability. A large proportion of LGBTQA+ young people (73.7%) had self harmed at some point in their lives.

Comparisons Between Tasmania and other Australian States

Across all outcomes assessed within this report, adult LGBTQA+ populations in Tasmania reported similar rates of mental health concerns (e.g., psychological distress), suicidality, healthcare service access, and levels of community connectedness, as their counterparts in all other jurisdictions. LGBTQA+ adolescents and young people in Tasmania had similar mental health concerns as their counterparts in all other states and territories. In contrast to LGBTQA+ adults however, young LGBTQA+ people from Tasmania were more likely to have ever experienced suicidal ideation or self-harm in their lifetimes compared with LGBTQA+ young people from other states.

Racial and Homophobic Hate Crime

RCT Inc. is a member of the Hobart City Council Working for Harmony Multicultural Advisory Group, and as such is working with a range of national community representatives to assert that while legal homophobia is enshrined in many international criminal laws, it is not so in Australia, and that any practice of homophobia is illegal and in some cases criminal. Our work on this committee has been hard and in some instances not observed by council staff, but through insistence it is slowly making progress. In the multicultural festivals we are able to present our banner and staff and meet with people one-on-one.

Mostafa Faraje was a 13-year-old Iranian boy when he was forced to flee his home in Kurdistan and come by boat to Australia where he was wrongfully imprisoned in Western Australia for three years. Later he became involved with us in his advocacy. We accompanied Mostafa to Canberra to protest the imprisonment of boat people, and I represented SOGI forced-migrant boat people who should have been protected by section 9 of the UN Asylum Convention.

Mostafa later was racially abused at Calvary Hospital while completing his UTAS work practice nurse training. His courage to complain to the Tasmanian Anti-Discrimination Commission achieved a huge victory against racial abuse in that he was awarded \$13,000 compensation, but most importantly the University (UTAS and contracted Calvary Hospital) must train all their staff in anti-racial abuse training at their expense. A huge victory through his courage and because he was prepared to identify his heterosexual racial struggle with ours.

Finally, I commend this Annual Report to the members and friends of Rainbow Communities Tasmania Inc. for endorsement at the AGM on Tuesday, 15 April, 2025, followed by a morning tea at Willie Smith's restaurant.

I want to especially thank RCT Inc. members, and to thank the number of members and friends who have been a vital part of the important advocacy projects being reported on today that are reliant on the self-determination and initiative of people committed to the survival and progress of our community, 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 Incorporated

15 April, 2025