

rainbow communities tasmania



www.rainbowtas.org

GLBTI EQUITY & INCLUSION

Rainbow Communities Tasmania Inc.

ANNUAL REPORT 2024 – 2025

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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 and is proving to be a very effective, efficient advocacy body for LGBTIQ+ communities here in Tasmania and overseas.

RCT Inc. is self-determined, unfunded, fearless, LGBTIQ+ advocacy body without fear or favour to government or funding organisations, as the organisation is not dependant on them. This advocacy work is distinct but complimentary to the welfare work performed by Working it Out (WIO).

RCT Inc. has a long history emerging from the tour in 1995 of Human Rights Commissioner, Brian Burdekin, and Julian Punch, then of the Australian Youth Foundation, meeting small groups of gay people in Tasmania who were consulted as to their needs and possible funding options. This included a proposal in North West Tasmania that led to funding for the Working It Out (WIO) Organisation.

League of Gentlefellows (LOG) and the Rainbow Dinner Moving From Protest to Social Change

RCT Inc. followed the model of Sydney's annual Mardi Gras in moving from a strong protest movement to one of social engagement. The League of Gentlefellows (LOG), a branch of RCT Inc., was immensely successful in its monthly social meetings in members' houses, over afternoon teas catered for by social hosts. LGBTIQ+ guests contributed a small amount at the functions. The financial contributions, with an eventual collection of \$70,000 – \$80,000, formed the (now depleted) financial basis of RCT Inc.'s advocacy work, and aided in engaging people in a movement for social change.

The Annual Rainbow Dinner was staged at regional commercial venues such as Ranelagh's Home Hill Winery and later on at Hobart's Wrest Point Casino, and attracted up to and over 300 guests including heads of departments, politicians, and notable social activists. It was a huge event and RCT Inc.'s *Rainbow Awards*, held during the dinner, celebrated those who had achieved significant social change for LGBTIQ+ people.

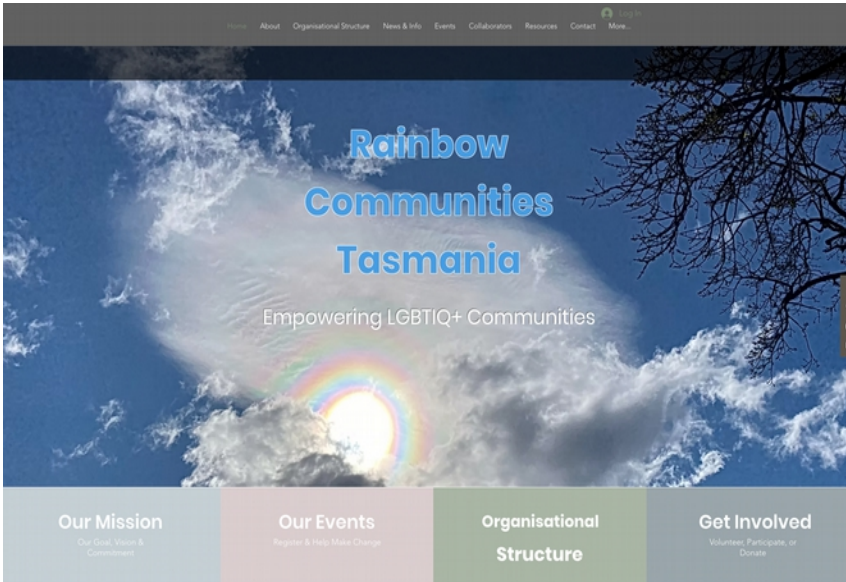


The League of Gentlefellows'
Annual Rainbow Dinner

The RCT Inc. 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, requiring the work of dedicated members of the organisation and friends acting with the support of the resolute Committee of Management.

RCT Inc. Friends

Thanks to the efforts of Secretary/Treasurer, Brian Doran, RCT Inc.'s membership has substantially increased and we have 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.



<https://www.rainbowtas.org/>

RCT Inc. Website

We are very grateful to Jo Goodman who, as a dedicated volunteer, has restored and renewed the RCT Inc. website. 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, regional and interestingly, international LGBTIQ+ people requiring information or assistance, and for promoting their initiatives and programs. Thank you, Jo. We are concerned to help you acquire a new computer and software programs required for ongoing development and maintenance of the organisation's website. If members and friends can assist Jo in any way, that would be of great assistance and much appreciated.

Suicide and Ideation Prevention

The RCT Inc. Executive made a submission at a hearing of the Tasmanian Parliament's *Inquiry Into Bullying and Discrimination in Tasmanian Schools* (the Inquiry). <https://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/committees/house-of-assembly/standing-committees/government-administration-committee-a/inquiries/inquiry-into-discrimination-and-bullying-in-tasmanian-schools>

While recommending to the Inquiry a proactive approach to eliminating the fundamental causes of homophobia that are structured and funded in many of our organisations, we proposed changes that the Inquiry needs to identify, promote and eradicate or exchange for positive policies.

Human Rights Legislation & the Tasmanian Anti-Discrimination Act, as well the State Government Public Service ‘Managing Diversity Program’, are keys to positive administration of managing diversity in the State.

Homophobic discrimination and hatred by the Churches directed to LGBTIQ+ peoples 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 Suicidality Tasmania Briefing Paper, which illustrates that suicidality and mental ill-health are serious concerns that impact especially the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) populations.

Out of the whole of Australia, discrimination against gay people and statistics regarding resulting ideation and suicide is highest in Tasmania.

<https://www.latrobe.edu.au/arcs/hs/work/lgbtiq-health/lgbtqa-mental-health-and-suicidality>

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.

The above mentioned 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 amongst 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;
- Draw comparisons between experience of LGBTQA+ people in Tasmania compared to other jurisdictions in Australia, and where possible, comparisons between LGBTQA+ people in Tasmania is higher than the general population using the latest data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS - 2022).

Recent suicide attempt and ideation was also more likely to be reported by participants from TAS (7.8%) and QLD (7.1%), followed by WA (6.2%), ACT (5.7%), VIC (4.5%), SA (4.2%) and NSW (4.1%).

Intense homophobia is still practiced nationally in Catholic and some other religious schools, leading to high rates of self-harm and suicide in these schools and out into the community. Dr Gerard Gaskin has retired as head of Catholic Education Tasmania after school principals allegedly told the Archbishop that they had lost confidence in him.

Retired Archbishop, Julian Porteous, achieved a State Government exemption that stands to this day, to exclude gay teachers from Catholic Schools. While he failed to gain an exemption from the Technical Aid to the Disabled (TAD) Act to exclude gay students, he persists in this policy. Both Gaskin and Porteous are impelled to encourage a religious code in Catholic schools promoting LGBTIQ+ students as “*immoral, unnatural and decadent*”. Surely this represents hate speech against a certain demographic?

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, “*Don't Mess with Marriage*”, to about 12,000 Tasmanian families with children in 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*”. According to the book, allegedly most senior clerics in the Roman Catholic Church who have vociferously attacked homosexuality, as well as eighty per cent of priests working at the Vatican, are themselves gay although not necessarily sexually active.

The 570-page book, which the French journalist and author Frédéric Martel spent four years researching, is a “*startling account of corruption and hypocritic 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>

Throughout 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. RCT Inc. has been part of this protest.

The Australian bishops were also rejected by Pope Francis, who approved a landmark ruling to allow 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 Australian Catholic schools, while Asian-ordained and in-the-main conservative priests come to Australia on 457 visas granted by the Australian Government to the Church. This was of concern to the Inquiry, given that these priests are subtly threatened that their visas are subject to review if they do not follow the Bishop's conservative moral code.

Thankfully this papal support for the LGBTIQ+ communities is being taken up by the new Pope Leo XIV and the new Tasmanian Catholic Archbishop, Anthony Ireland. There are three committees that are negotiating a pastoral support initiative for Tasmanian LGBTIQ+ communities with Archbishop Ireland. Peter Confeggi of RCT Inc. is negotiating a full theological acceptance of our communities in these committees.

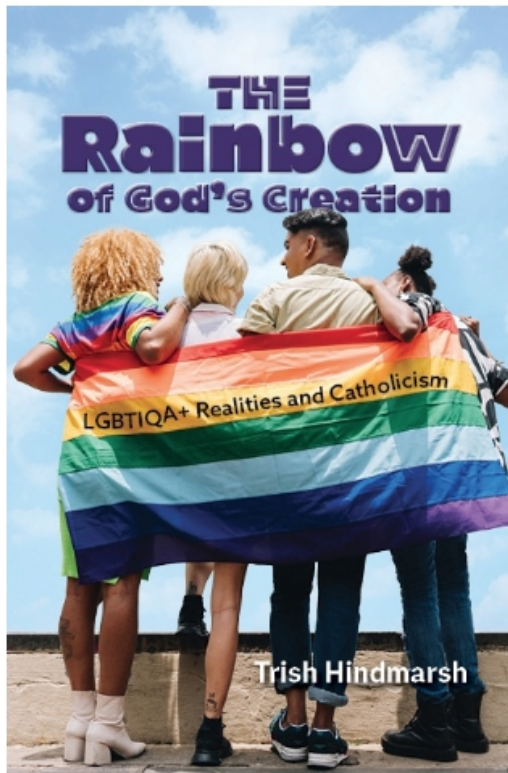
Practical Collaborations in the Fight Against Homophobia in Tasmanian Churches and Education System

This year RCT Inc.'s relationship with Trish Hindmarsh, past Head of Catholic Education in Tasmania, in her campaign to write her book "*The Rainbow of God's Creation LGBTIQ+ Realities and Catholicism*", has inspired us to challenge the church in Tasmania to provide our LGBTIQ+ communities with spiritual recognition and support. This has involved:

- Working with Trish to promote her book and pursue her campaign with the new Archbishop for spiritual support of the LGBTIQ+ Communities.
- RCT Inc. member-written books, '*Gay with God*' by Julian Punch, and "*Memoir of a Reluctant Cleric*" by Peter Confeggi, have inspired responses from many readers, especially concerned parents and students in Catholic schools, in their campaign against Pell, the bishops and priests in their policies against LGBTIQ+ communities.
- Encouraging Catholic students and schools to protest against the persecution of LGBTIQ+ people as '*immoral, unnatural, and decadent*' and intersex and transgender students as '*incomplete*'.
- Planning to meet the new Archbishop about a pastoral plan for LGBTIQ+ peoples.



Dr. Trish Hindmarsh – Author of “The Rainbow of God's Creation”



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

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

We are committed to advocacy by self-determination of the LGBTIQ+ communities rather than charismatic posturing by select individual leaders. 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 in practice is a practice that our community members must face with parents, family and community members, as opposed to the presumption that they are heterosexual.

RCT Inc. works in the 76 Countries that, contrary to the *UNHCR Convention on Asylum (Section 9)*, prosecute, execute, torture, and persecute LGBTIQ+ peoples. RCT Inc. visits and support LGBTIQ+ people in these countries as well as the expatriate communities now growing in the Australian states.

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

Opposing Racist-based Homophobia in Expatriate Settlements in Australia

Through the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) Independent Advisor for access to support in these 76 Countries, RCT Inc. is submitting a bid to the UN for support and assistance to seek safety asylum in secure countries, also for safety in embassies and UN offices. In the past, gay people who sought assistance in these embassies and UN offices have been exposed, and in some cases even executed.

While arranged cultural persecution and discrimination including arranged marriages and “honour-killings” are illegal in Australia, in local expatriate multicultural communities these cultural habits are not discouraged or prosecuted as they ought to be. Through the Multicultural Council of Tasmania (MCOT), RCT Inc. took a stand. Disappointingly, MCOT did not support this stand as it might have, and RCT Inc. representatives were treated very harshly by some members of the committee and security staff. This perhaps happened because of inherited attitudes concerning diversity, as well as cultural abhorrence of publicly discussing any kind of sexuality by immigrants from those countries.



Pia Saturno, Tasmanian Anti-Discrimination Commissioner

The RCT Inc. Committee of Management met with the acting state Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, Pia Saturno, to discuss the need to initiate community discussion and awareness of the LGBTIQA+ discrimination in their institutions and departments.

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.

NSW premier flags new laws after IS-inspired attacks on gay and bisexual teens

By state political reporter Alexander Lewis and Sean Rubinsztein-Dunlop of ABC Investigations

State and Territory Government

Wed 25 Feb



Mr Minns says the government is looking at bringing in 'massive new penalties'. (ABC News: Abubakr Sajid)

In short:

NSW Premier Chris Minns has flagged new penalties and criminal offences for people targeting violent crime because of their sexuality.

The announcement comes hours after the ABC released shocking videos of IS-inspired attacks on gay and bisexual people.

What's next?

NSW Police Commissioner Mal Lanyon is urging victims to come forward with information so police can take action.

While the Public Service Commissioner has initiated a program of reporting, evaluating and managing diversity on an annual basis in state departments and public institutions, in many private institutions these measures are not valued or managed. The Inquiry could make a valuable contribution by exposing this as a strategic cause of bullying and discrimination in the schools of both staff and students. 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, and 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 LGBTIQ+ 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. Archbishop Charles Balvo was appointed Apostolic Nuncio in January 2022 by Pope Francis.

Submissions to the Papal Nuncio in Australia may be addressed to:

Apostolic Nunciature

2 Vancouver Street,

RED HILL ACT 2603

Phone: +61 02 6295 3876

Email: na.australia@diplom.vatican.va

Fax: +61 02 6295 3690

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

- RCT Inc. engages in supporting persecuted people through the process of disavowal of religious LGBTIQ+, “immoral unnatural and decadent” paranoia, and to accompany them through the process of leaving their families, countries or organisations to seek a safe country or environment.

While the Inquiry Into Bullying and Discrimination in Tasmanian Schools and its recommendations were suspended due to the state election, it is being revived by the new Tasmanian Government, so hopefully will activate the recommendations including those from RCT Inc.

- Barrister and migration lawyer, Kim Heap from WPM Lawyers has been a generous pro-bono migration officer assisting people from the 76 countries to gain Australian protection visas for settlement here. We are interested in establishing a Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot (CRISP) program to enable providing essential support to those seeking re-settlement once they reach Australia.

This will require a strong LGBTIQ+ cultural awareness and safety code to protect forced migrants;

- RCT Inc. is now supporting an international group of silent, forced, asylum seekers from an increasing number of the 76 countries that persecute LGBTIQ+ people;
- RCT Inc. has become a member of the Virtual LGBTIQ Resettlement and Settlement Roundtable Agenda established by the Department of Home Affairs. Its agenda is developed by the international group of forced LGBTIQ+ 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.

Important in this area is RCT Inc.'s link with the *Bridge to Safety* program, launched by the *Forcibly Displaced People Network (FDPN)* ^{*1} in partnership with *Refugee Advice and Casework Service (RACS)* ^{*2}, designed to provide specialised, peer-led support to assist LGBTIQ+ people from the Asia and the Pacific regions who are facing persecution based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, expression, or sex characteristics. The program's goal is to help LGBTIQ+ refugees access priority processing for humanitarian visas and to overcome barriers to resettlement.



Forcibly Displaced People Network (FDPN)



^{*1} <https://www.fdpn.org.au/>



^{*2} <https://www.racs.org.au/>

Banning Conversion Therapy

While Tasmania's government has made a public apology for those convicted under the state's former anti-LGBTIQA+ 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 LGBTIQA+ 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 LGBTIQA+ People

RCT Inc. has developed a national involvement in the 76 countries that execute, imprison, torture and persecute SOGI diverse people. The 1951 Refugee 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:

<https://www.fmreview.org/sogi>

Following an invite from a SOGI person and seven visits to Bangladesh to learn of the situation and to gain an understanding of the issues that these people face and how to work with SOGI forced immigrants from these countries and the daily contacts supporting people, 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, following the inevitable failure of the marriage, honour killings by family members of their SOGI relatives.

This work 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 by careless workers lead to execution and honour-killing beheadings. 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.

It is also impossible, given life-threatening retaliation, to process humanitarian or protection visas in their home countries. UN commissioners, Chris Sidoti and Brian Burdekin, have supported RCT Inc. 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 *UNHCR 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 later transfer to overseas detention centres on Christmas, Nauru and Manus Islands.

<https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/overview/1951-refugee-convention>

RCT Inc.'s unique involvement and work with SOGI people assists them:

- As SOGI people in their country of origin to develop and understand their sexuality and their asylum pathway to seek a safe haven country to live in;
- 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;
- In gaining protection visas if they reach Australia.

Pursuing the Virtual LGBTQI Resettlement and Settlement Roundtable Agenda established by the Department of Home Affairs in the multicultural ex-patriate communities for our SOGI members has been very difficult, and is resisted by practices that are legal in their home country but illegal in their new home of Australia, e.g., arranged marriages, honour-killings, gender mutilation etc.

RCT Inc. has joined several multicultural committees e.g., Hobart City Council Working for Harmony, Multicultural Council of Tasmania (MCOT), Kingborough Multicultural Committee.

Gay Hate Crime Review and Reform

At our home at Longley, Tasmania, my partner and I endured seven years of hate speech and bullying from a neighbour as we daily walked our dogs down the road. The harassment only stopped after we made a complaint to the Tasmanian Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, which was addressed in the Terrorist and Destructive Activities (TADA) Tribunal. The decision found the respondent guilty of hate speech and crime, and we were eventually compensated.

Despite court restraint orders, Tasmanian Police truly did little to protect us until a courageous Kingston police officer, Julian Purrand, to his detriment, stood outside the tribunal hearings in full uniform to give evidence of the hate speech and crime in our case. We were awarded compensation for the hate speech but nothing regarding the hate acts of violence against us, as there was, at the time, no hate crime legislation.

(See Anti-Discrimination Tribunal of Tasmania cases M/2014/3866 and M/2014/589 Julian Punch and Brian Doran v. Benedict King.)

<https://www.rainbowtas.org/post/compensation-victory-after-long-wait-for-tasmanian-couple-s-justice-as-victims-of-gay-hate-crime>

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 Land Deeds and Titles Office. Seven years later, in February 2023, we finally received \$6,000 compensation payment, plus interest.



(L -R) RCT Inc.'s Brian Doran and Julian Punch at home in Longley, Tasmania.

Discrimination and Bullying of LGBTIQ+ People Causing High Rates of Suicide and Ideation

Levels of mental ill-health and suicidality are very high among both LGBTQ+ adults and young people in Tasmania. Lifetime suicidal ideation was prevalent for 79.0% of LGBTQ+ adults and 88.8% of LGBTQ+ young people, with 48.1% of adults and 63.1% of young people reporting recent suicidal ideation. 36.7% of LGBTQ+ adults and 32.7% of LGBTQ+ 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 Territories

Across all outcomes assessed within this report, adult LGBTQA+ populations in Tasmania reported similar rates of mental health concerns as their counterparts in all other jurisdictions, e.g., psychological distress, suicidality, healthcare service access, and levels of community connectedness. 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 experienced suicidal ideation or self-harm in their lifetimes compared with LGBTQA+ young people from other states.

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 Smiths restaurant, Grove.

I want to especially thank the number of RCT Inc. 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 emanate from organisations and ideologies that resist our community's full inclusion and equity.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Julian S. Punch".

Julian S. Punch

President, Rainbow Communities Tasmania Inc. - 01 March, 2026