# FAQs for Bridges Inclusion Project

1. **What is the project?**

The Inclusion Project is a commitment from Bridges to be inclusive and welcoming of everyone. Bridges is working towards celebrating diversity and recognises the importance of an organisational structure that supports and values everyone’s identity, including clients, volunteers and staff. Bridges launched the project in May 2018 to increase our support specifically of people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds and people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI). Bridges has zero tolerance of discrimination, bullying and harassment. We strive to be a trail blazer in the Knox region for inclusivity in community service.

1. **Why have we initiated the Inclusion Project?**

Everyone has the right to access community services, and we want Bridges to be welcoming of everyone. People from CALD and LGBTI communities make up a large portion of our ageing population; 20% of Australians older than 65 identify as CALD and 11% of the population identify as LGBTI. The Government is expecting an influx of clients from these communities needing access to aged care services and these communities have ‘special needs’ due to their life experiences. It is now legislation that health care provides take measures to accommodate these needs.   
  
For example, older LGBTI people have experienced a history of discrimination in Australian society, suffering from criminalisation, violence, stigma, discrimination, rejection by friends and family, and social isolation, so they don’t often have support in their old age. Distrust of the health and social services sector among LGBTI people from historical experiences often results in reluctance to utilise mainstream services, including aged care. This is why it is so important that Bridges can support this community.

Bridges wishes to reduce and eliminate any barriers to entry that may prevent either of these groups (CALD and LGBTI) from accessing our services, services that will assist them in healthy aging. Bridges is obliged to be proactive in this area and we are preparing for a changing demographic of individuals that need our services.

1. **What legislation says that Bridges has to be inclusive?**

Since 2013 LGBTI people have been included as a ‘special need’ group within the Aged Care Act 1997 which means that providers must show they are taking measures to address these special needs in order to receive funding. Furthermore the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 was also amended in 2013 to provide new protections against discrimination on the basis of a person’s sexual orientation, gender identity, and intersex status, and provide protection against discrimination for same-sex de facto couples. This amendment ensured that all aged care service providers, regardless of their organisation type, are required to provide non-discriminatory service.  
  
Discrimination is also covered under:

* the Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth), the Sex Discrimination Amendment (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Intersex Status) Act 2013 (Cth)
* the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth)
* Relevant State/Territory based industrial relations legislation, stating that organisations have to at a minimum demonstrate a positive duty to act to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation in the workplace and its systems of work.
* The *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (Vic) - prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender identity and sexual orientation
* The *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic) and the *Same-Sex Relationships* (Equal Treatment in Commonwealth Laws) — *General Law Reform Act 2008* (Cth) - require that same-sex couples and families are treated equally for the purposes of federal laws

1. **What is LGBTI?**

**Lesbian** A woman who identifies as, has romantic and/or sexual relationships with, and/or is attracted to women.  
 **Gay** A man who identifies as, has romantic and/or sexual relationships with, and/or is attracted to men.  
 **Bisexual** A person who identifies as or who has romantic and/or sexual relationships with, and/or attractions toward people of multiple genders

**Transgender** An individual whose gender identity is not typically associated with their assigned sex at birth. Trans is independent of sexuality and as such trans people may identify as heterosexual, gay, bisexual, etc.  
 **Intersex** An umbrella term for people with physical characteristics that are seen as different from modern medical norms about ‘female’ and ‘male’ bodies. Intersex people, also people with intersex variations, have physical variations from strictly ‘female’ and ‘male’ bodies. These physical characteristics are present at birth and manifest during physical development.

1. **What is the difference between sexuality and gender identity?**

**Sexuality** – Describes emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attractions towards others, often describing the gender of people with whom someone builds relationships.

**Gender Identity** – Describes someone’s own understanding of who they are (e.g., woman, man, no gender, transgender etc.), as distinct from their physical characteristics.   
  
Please note - The “LGB” in “LGBTI” refers to sexuality. The “T” in “LGBTI” describes gender identity. Intersex is not considered a sexuality or gender identity; intersex people have different sex characteristics.

1. **What do you say when someone says they don’t believe in equal rights**

It is important to answer this question on behalf of Bridges so we have a uniform response to these queries. It can be useful to bring this back to a personal level and speak about individuals.   
  
If someone expresses to you that they don’t believe in equal rights of LGBTI people you can challenge them by asking why and providing stories about an LGBTI person you know (you can always talk about me!). You can ask them why someone should be treated differently just because of their identity or why some people should deserve to be excluded from our service.   
  
If the person you’re speaking to doesn’t respond well, you can tell them that Bridges is an inclusive organisation and therefore they need to keep those views to themselves. Making individuals feel unwelcome due to lack of respect is discrimination, and in Bridges Values and Behaviours document all volunteers and staff agreed to treat people with fairness, integrity and respect including freedom from discrimination.

1. **What do you say when someone uses inappropriate language**

You have two options, to either address something in the moment or speak to someone afterwards. It’s often better to address something straight away; however it’s not always possible.

* If someone was to use a homophobic word like “fag”, you could respond directly with something like: “I think you should use a different word – the one you just used is pretty upsetting to a lot of people.”
* Or you can have a personal conversation with someone at a later time, acknowledging what their intentions might have been and assisting them to understand why they’ve done or said something problematic. Using the same example, you could chat to someone later and say something like: “In our conversation today I noticed you using this word. Just letting you know that it’s pretty upsetting to a lot of people, especially gay men. It’s a word that has been used with quite a lot of hate and violence towards people, and that’s how it’s taken, even if you don’t mean it that way. At Bridges we’re working towards everyone feeling welcome so please don’t use that word during our activities."

1. **What to say when someone doesn’t want any involvement in the project**

“There is no obligation to fill out the survey however we do expect that everyone is on board with being inclusive and welcoming, and there will be training that everyone will need to be part of in the future. This is to make sure Bridges is complying with current legislation.”

1. **What to say if someone wants to get involved or wants more information**

“We have an Inclusion Project steering group and we would love you to be part of it! You can get in touch at Ruthi by calling the office on a Tuesday or Wednesday, or emailing her ruthih@bridgescc.com.au”

1. **What to say if someone comes out or tells you personal information about their sexual orientation or gender identity**

Listen to them and have a conversation about it. After you have finished the conversation ask two important questions:

“Do they want you to keep the information to yourself or is it ok to speak to other staff including Ruthi our Inclusion Officer so she can be in touch?”

“Do you need additional support? You can contact Qlife – 1800 184 527 . Qlife provides phone counselling and referrals for LGBTI friendly services.”

Read this document for further information about people coming out - <https://qlife.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/4-Coming-Out-and-Disclosure-for-web.pdf>