

# **Bridges Connecting Communities:**

# **Inclusion Project Resource**

**Bridges experience  
implementing an inclusive  
community, focusing on the  
CALD and LGBTI groups.**

A Resource Guide for community capacity building,  
all you need to know to start your inclusive journey.

Summary, learnings and lessons from a six-month inclusion project.

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# Introduction

## What is the Inclusion project?

The Inclusion Project is a commitment from Bridges to be inclusive and welcoming of everyone. In order for Bridges to deliver inclusive services that address the preferences and needs of our clients, Bridges must create an environment where clients feel safe to share their identity with us, letting us know who they are and what's important to them. Bridges 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 the support specifically of people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds and people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI). Bridges strive to be a trail blazer in the Knox region for inclusivity in community service. Bridges has zero tolerance for discrimination, bullying and harassment.

The aims of the project were to embed LGBTI inclusive practice across all organizational systems to assure the needs of the LGBTI community are understood, respected and addressed in Bridges care, policies and services. The project worked towards reducing barriers to entry for the LGBTI community and has successfully raised awareness with clients, volunteers and staff.

Bridges employed an Inclusion Project Officer for a period of six months for two days a week due to the generous contribution of the Knox City Council through their Community Development Fund Grant. This has allowed Bridges to bring specific expertise and skills to embed inclusive practices across the whole of the organisation. It also meant more could be achieved with a skilled staff member dedicated to inclusive practice, as time constraints had proven to be a significant hurdle in working towards inclusive practice up to this point.

Bridges continues to strive to create an inclusive culture where everyone feels comfortable and safe to be themselves whilst receiving services to support them to continue living at home.



# Background

## Bridges Connecting Communities – Who Are We?

Bridges Connecting Communities (Bridges) is a not for profit charity that provides volunteer services to Senior residents and people with a disability who are living at home in the Knox and South West Yarra Ranges. The programs are delivered in a flexible and responsive way, tailored to suit each client's preferences and needs. This approach provides positive health and wellbeing outcomes by helping clients to remain independent, build social connections and participate in meaningful activities.

Bridges was founded in 1975 by a visionary group of volunteers who recognised the needs of the elderly residents in the City of Knox. Since this time, Bridges has succeeded in providing programs in the form of transport, assisted shopping, social support groups, pet companion, friendly visiting, phone a friend and carers support groups.

Bridges vision is to deliver quality in outstanding services and programs that provides a positive impact on the welfare and wellbeing of its clients.

Our mission is to empower older people and people with a disability and their carers to remain independent and participating members of our community; by developing a caring community of volunteer action and community-based support, welcoming people with diverse characteristics and life experiences.

### Chief Executive Officer:

This project emerged from a workshop that I attended in 2016 where I developed an Action Plan as I realized through an internal audit we did not meet the LGBTI standards expected of us. I watched a video of a gentleman who had identified as a gay man and at the age of seventeen spent time in jail because at the time it was illegal to have same-sex relations. He was eventually released on a good behaviour bond but lived with the stigma of a criminal record. I had never realized that was illegal having grown up as a young girl watching a popular TV series "Number 96", with one of its characters a gay man. Homosexuality was decriminalized in 1980 (Vic) and in 2015 the Victorian government expunged criminal records, so this gentleman had spent all of his life with a criminal record for being gay. This video evoked compassion for a gentleman now an older man skeptical of the legal system, not trusting of governments and not wanting to access services to support him living at home because of fear of judgement and persecution. This is a barrier to our service and one that can be eliminated with education and awareness and the ability to change policies and procedures to ensure all who are eligible to use our service can and will. This Action Plan stayed on my desk as a reminder of what I needed to do but lacked time and resources to implement. I would like to thank the Knox City Council through their Community Development Fund for providing a grant to obtain expertise and skills to implement this action plan. The outcome has been a rewarding journey watching conversation flow, our growth in understanding

the needs of people from a diverse background and community capacity building through inclusion. You may tell me that we are already inclusive why do this, but for the individuals in our community who have endured persecution and judgement they need us to put in our marketing materials and on our website we are inclusive to all, as everyone deserves to have a fulfilled life and be part of community. I cannot thank Ruthi enough for her dedication, commitment and sharing her experience and skillset with us to bring this project to fruition.

### The resource authors are:

**Ruthi Hambling**  
*Inclusion Project Officer*

**Rita Lang**  
*Bridges Chief Executive Officer*

### Acknowledgements

Bridges acknowledges the traditional landowners the Wurundjeri and Bunurong people of the Kulin Nation and pay their respects to elder's past, present and future.

Bridges would like to thank:

- The Inclusion Project Steering Committee for their great contribution to the project and ongoing commitment to Bridges mission to be welcoming of people with diverse characteristics and life experiences.
- The Knox City Council as the LGBTI Community Inclusion Project has been supported by a grant from the Knox City Council Community Development Fund.
- Dale Park the Regional Diversity Advisor from the Eastern Sector Development Team for his ongoing support and workshops.
- Bridges Board for their support throughout this project.



# Process

## Project stages:

The project was divided into three stages. The actions in these stages are summarized below, however a complete list of actions taken in each stage is listed in our Action Plan (which can be found on our website under resources).

### Stage 1 Research and Planning, 2 months:

- surveying staff, clients and volunteers on current processes and attitudes
- researching current legislation and useful resources
- conducting an organization wide audit on inclusive practice
- writing a project plan
- forming a steering committee

### Stage 2 Organisational and Procedural Changes, 2 months:

- staff training
- developing resources
- rewriting policies
- changing organisational processes

### Stage 3 Raising Awareness and Support, 2 months:

- creating a volunteer training program
- conducting the training program
- changing Bridges communications to reflect inclusive practice
- designing an online training module for staff, and for other organisations to use
- writing a resource to be used by other organisations

## Auditing process:

Three audits were conducted; one at the very beginning of the project to understand the starting point and changes needed, another half way through to assess progress, and one at the end to measure our overall success. The Rainbow Tick auditing tool was used to conduct the audits. This resource was extended to also accommodate reflections on CALD inclusivity using the National Aged Care Strategy for people from CALD backgrounds. This Rainbow Tick auditing tool provided the basis for the Action Plan, as each indicator provides a list of actions needed to meet each standard of the Rainbow Tick.

## Summary of Results:

The project has been extremely successful in such a short timeline. For detailed explanation of results refer to the appendix.

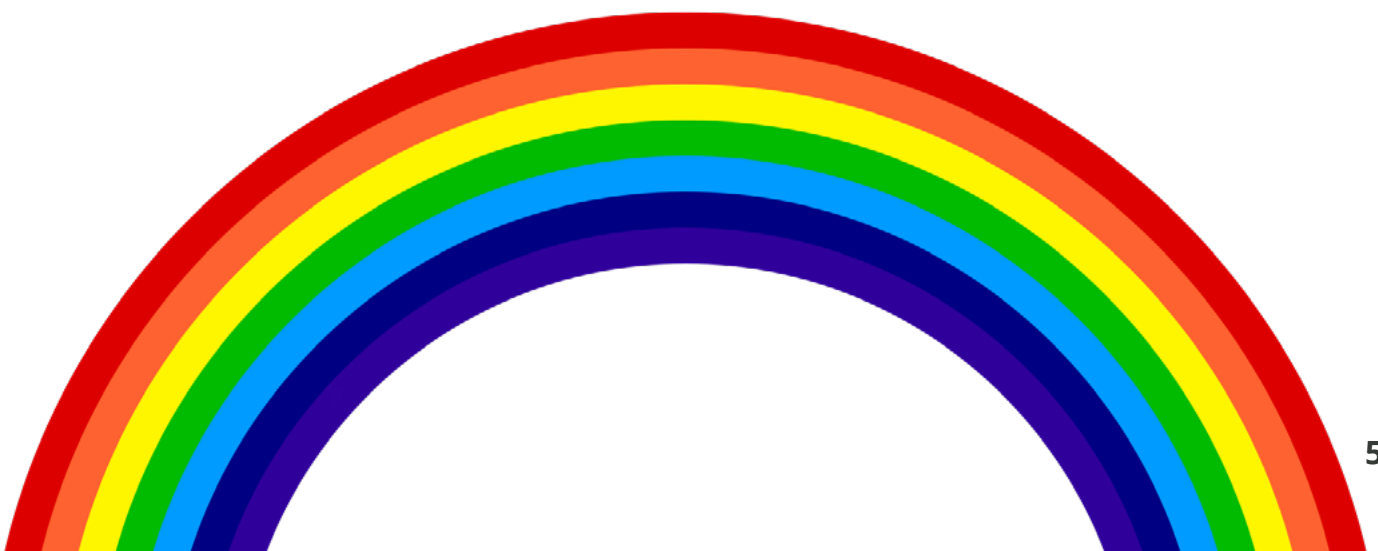
- If we were audited, we would expect to meet 21 out of 25 indicators for the Rainbow Tick, and we believe we are on target for meeting 25 out of 25 by mid 2019. The only consideration keeping us from meeting 100% of the indicators at the present, is completing training with our large body of volunteers. We completed training with 85 volunteers which is just shy of 40% of our cohort of volunteers. More training sessions will be offered in the first quarter of 2019.
- All policies have been updated to include inclusive language and processes.
- All client and volunteer forms updated to be inclusive
- All communications reviewed to include statements on inclusive language
- Internal processes reviewed to ensure inclusivity for clients, volunteers and staff
- All staff have participated in at least two training sessions, with some staff attending up to five training sessions on inclusion, a comprehensive staff guide was developed to support staff with inclusive language (which can be found on our website under resources). A Volunteer Quick reference on inclusive language was developed for staff and Volunteers, Appendix A.
- A specific risk assessment has been created and an Inclusion Project risks component added to Bridges Risk Management Plan, Appendix B.
- Five volunteers and one staff member recruited to join the Steering Committee. Commitment to continue to meet and uphold standards going forward
- The results of our surveys showed a significant increase from both volunteers and staff in ratings of knowledge in providing services for CALD and LGBTI clients, when comparing base data to data collected at the end of the project





## Examples of inclusive language used during the project:

Resource	Inclusive language added
Mission statement	"...welcoming people with diverse characteristics and life experiences"
Main advertising brochure	"Bridges provides a welcoming environment to our entire community, including people from CALD backgrounds and the LGBTI community" + Adding photo of the steering committee with visible rainbow
General changes to all documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Removing questions regarding 'sex' and replacing with 'gender' accompanied by an open box to answer (rather than giving options)</li> <li>• Removing any reference to 'he/she' pronouns and replacing with 'they'</li> <li>• Removing the need for titles, and simply using names eg. New policy to address letters to simply a name, rather than Ms. XXX</li> </ul>
Client welcome letter	"Bridges celebrates diversity and recognises the importance of an organisational structure that supports and values everyone's identity, including clients, volunteers and staff. Bridges provides a welcoming environment for our entire community, including those from the LGBTI community and from CALD backgrounds. Bridges has zero tolerance of discrimination, bullying and harassment. As a Bridges client we expect you to be aligned with our mission to be welcoming of everyone and actively inclusive of all."
Client intake forms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asking if the client identifies as a member of the following groups; LGTBI, CALD, Financially or Socially Disadvantaged, Veterans, Homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, or Care leaver</li> <li>• Creating a new process in our database to note down information on identity, with the ability to match volunteers and clients if suitable eg. Same language</li> </ul>
Volunteer intake forms	Asking if the volunteer has experience or a special interest in working with clients identifying as belonging to the following groups; LGTBI, CALD, Financially or Socially Disadvantaged, Veterans, Homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, or Care leaver
Policies	<p>Total review of policies including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• new policy to support employees that are transgender and/or transitioning</li> <li>• reviewed policy on conflict resolution process for non-inclusive language - updated privacy and confidentiality policies to include sexuality and gender</li> </ul>



# Learnings

## General advice for those starting a similar project:

- Before launching a project, it is important that staff are supportive and understand why the project is being initiated. It is also important that all staff, particularly managers are equipped for questions that may arise when launching the project. The first step should be sending staff to external training as soon as possible. Training is available through the EMR Alliance and the Silver Rainbow offered by Val's Café (LaTrobe University).
- Check if there is any funding available through grants to support the project. An important hurdle to overcome is finding the time to dedicate to the project. Any additional support goes a long way.
- Review your risk management plan and conflict resolution process to ensure they include issues relevant to the project
- Once the organisation is ready to handle questions and potential conflicts, advertise for expressions of interest to join a Steering Committee.
- Refer to the Rainbow Tick Guide to LGBTI Inclusive Practice, the Aged Care Diversity Framework and other resources to write a project plan
- Ensure to use an intersectional lens during your project eg. Consider intersections with homelessness, age, language and literacy barriers, rurality, living with a disability, identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, and ethnicity. Refer to the 'diversity jigsaw' and 'connecting the pieces' as they are a great resource tool in articulating the unique aspects of diversity.

## Three lessons learnt:

### 1. Careful consideration of timing

**Explanation:** Timing presented a significant challenge during the project, as certain changes needed board approval and Bridge's board met monthly. There were various procedural changes that needed to happen at the beginning to educate and support staff in dealing with situations that arose. The first step of the project was to release a survey to gather data on how inclusive the organisation was at the beginning of the project and to ask for suggestions for steps towards inclusion and interest in the steering group. The reasoning for doing this before anything else was to gather quantitative data on volunteer and client opinions and attitudes that could be used as a comparative data set to measure the success of the project.

**Risk:** As soon as we began communications about the project with clients and volunteers, conversations arose about why the organisation had decided to start the project which presented a risk of negative comments about the LGBTI community. A risk management plan had been developed prior to starting the project but as the project evolved Bridges was exposed to further risks. Staff had not been briefed on how to manage these situations.

**Learning:** The first step should be writing a detailed risk assessment before anything else, then review your conflict resolution policy to ensure it includes how to manage non-inclusive language or comments. Staff should also be provided with a script outlining what to say when presented with negative comments about inclusion. Bridges created a Frequently Asked Questions document that provided this information, (refer to website under resources), however we should have released this at the very beginning of the project to provide extra support for staff.

### 2. Starting from the top in ensuring people are on board

**Explanation:** Gaining support for a project that is working towards changing a workplace culture relies on support from key decision makers. This project had the full and total support of the CEO which is why we have had such success. However, in other organisations where this isn't the case, lack of support would present a serious hurdle.

**Risk:** There will always be push back against change and lack of support presents a risk to the success of the project. The CEO needs to be willing to take on difficult conversations and address conflict for progress to occur.

**Learning:** Bridges Inclusion Project owes much of its success to the support of our CEO and the courage that is needed to partake in a project that can be considered controversial.

### 3. Having support from those that are the face of the organisation

**Explanation:** In a community organisation, there are many people who are considered the 'face' of an organisation. At Bridges there are many volunteers who aid in coordinators services to clients, and in many cases, it is the volunteers that are considered to be the representatives of Bridges.

**Risk:** If volunteers aren't kept accountable in the same way as paid staff, this can present a risk in how an organisation is being represented.

**Learning:** Staff members and volunteers must have the same responsibilities of upholding values and the same training opportunities. Extra emphasis should be given to volunteers who are helping to coordinate services.

# Three common comments and how to address them:

## Comment: “Sexuality is none of our business”

**Possible response:** The argument that a person’s sexual orientation is a private matter is common but flawed. A person who is heterosexual brings their orientation into conversation constantly and is free to discuss this openly without fear of discrimination. Even something as simple as describing what we did on our weekend can reveal personal information (‘My husband/wife and I went out for dinner’, ‘I went camping with my girlfriend/boyfriend’). A large part of our service focuses on fighting isolation and loneliness by having conversations with our clients. Ensuring we are welcoming of different sexualities ensures that everyone feels they can fully express themselves, and they do not have to hide part of their identity.

## Comment: “We are already inclusive as we treat everyone as equals”

**Possible response:** For some communities to feel welcomed, they need more than being treated ‘like everyone else’. For the aging LGBTI community they have lived most of their lives knowing that sharing their sexuality or gender could lead to imprisonment, and they have faced a lot of discrimination from society, their peers and institutions. Often the assumption is that services will not be welcoming. In order for us to be fully welcoming we need to work through these barriers to ensure everyone knows they are welcome. Also, there may be things we are doing that we do not realise reflect non-inclusive practice, for example using the wrong pronoun. We are not all the same, and we need to treat people as an individual, we may treat everyone with dignity and respect but we need to deliver good services that respond to that individuality.

## Comment: “This is political correctness gone mad”

**Possible response:** This project is not about being politically correct; it is about providing a service for everyone. You would agree that LGBTI people have the right to access services like non-LGBTI people. This project is about ensuring that everyone is welcome at Bridges and that there are no barriers stopping people feeling welcome. The way we work has had to change over time to keep pace with many social, economic and technical shifts. This is just another example of needing to change in order to strengthen Bridges values and behaviour and through this commitment the highest standards of quality of service, fairness and respect will be achieved.

## Key References

- **Aged Care Diversity Framework**, [https://agedcare.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/04\\_2018/aged\\_care\\_diversity\\_framework.pdf](https://agedcare.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/04_2018/aged_care_diversity_framework.pdf)
- **EMR Alliance**, ‘Connecting The Pieces’ video and resources, <https://www.emralliance.org/connecting-the-pieces.html>
- **Diversity Council of Australia**, ‘Words at Work’ Inclusive Language Guide, [www.dca.org.au/research/project/wordsatwork-building-inclusion-through-power-language](http://www.dca.org.au/research/project/wordsatwork-building-inclusion-through-power-language)
- **Gay and Lesbian Health Victoria**, Rainbow Tick Guide to LGBTI inclusive Practice <https://www.glvh.org.au/sites/default/files/201702/Rainbow%20Tick%20guide%20to%20LGBTI%20inclusive%20practice%20web.pdf>
- **General resources from GLHV** <https://www.glvh.org.au/lgbti-inclusive-practice>  
\* For more resources refer to page 77 of the Rainbow Tick Guide
- **National Ageing and Aged Care Strategy** For people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds, [https://agedcare.health.gov.au/sites/g/files/net1426/f/documents/07\\_2015/dss1582\\_aged\\_care\\_strategy\\_cald\\_a4\\_vaccessible.pdf](https://agedcare.health.gov.au/sites/g/files/net1426/f/documents/07_2015/dss1582_aged_care_strategy_cald_a4_vaccessible.pdf)

## Further Resource Documents available on Bridges Website:

- Action Plan
- Comprehensive Staff Guide
- Survey templates – clients, volunteer and staff
- FAQs Document
- Online training link
- Resources – Val’s Planning for Action
- Survey Results



# Appendix A

## Volunteer Quick Reference Guide

### BRIDGES INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE GUIDE



**Bridges aim is to support our community by providing an inclusive service.**

As a volunteer you are a representative of Bridges and therefore you are responsible for providing inclusive service. Please use this guide to help ensure we are welcoming of everyone. **Language is a powerful tool for building inclusion.**

Try to	Avoid
Remember that language at work is different from language you may use at home	Using language which may be offensive when you are representing Bridges eg. Inappropriate jokes
Ask questions in a respectful manner and employ confidentiality	Probing for unnecessary information or share personal information without permission
Be mindful of your assumptions when speaking to clients, volunteers and staff	Making assumptions about relationship status, family or the gender of a person's partner
Use person centred language eg. Wheel chair user, person with a disability	Defining people by parts of their identity eg. Wheel chair bound, disabled person
Be conscious that physical characteristics do not inform identity	Making assumptions about identity based on characteristics eg. Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have light skin
Avoid racial stereotypes (even when considered positive)	Making positive or negative generalisations about members of a particular racial, ethnic or national group eg. 'Asians are good at maths'
Avoid gendered language and gender stereotypes	Making generalisations of what it means to 'be a man' or 'be a woman'
Respect the pronouns of trans and gender diverse people	Assuming a pronoun, or knowingly use the wrong pronoun
Acknowledge the varied life experiences of members within diverse communities	Assuming individuals from these communities are homogeneous or of one mind
Call others up on their disrespectful language	Accepting others disrespectful language, such as 'faggot' 'dyke' 'wog' 'tranny' 'etc
Keep an open mind and remember we are all different	Judging and consider some things to be 'normal'

#### Myth busting

**"That's so PC"** Inclusive language is not about being 'politically correct' – it is about using language which is **respectful, accurate, and relevant** to everyone. The way we work has had to change over time to keep pace with many social, economic, and technological shifts. Inclusive language at work is just one more tool organisations can use to respond to these shifts and deliver better business outcomes.



# BRIDGES INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE GUIDE

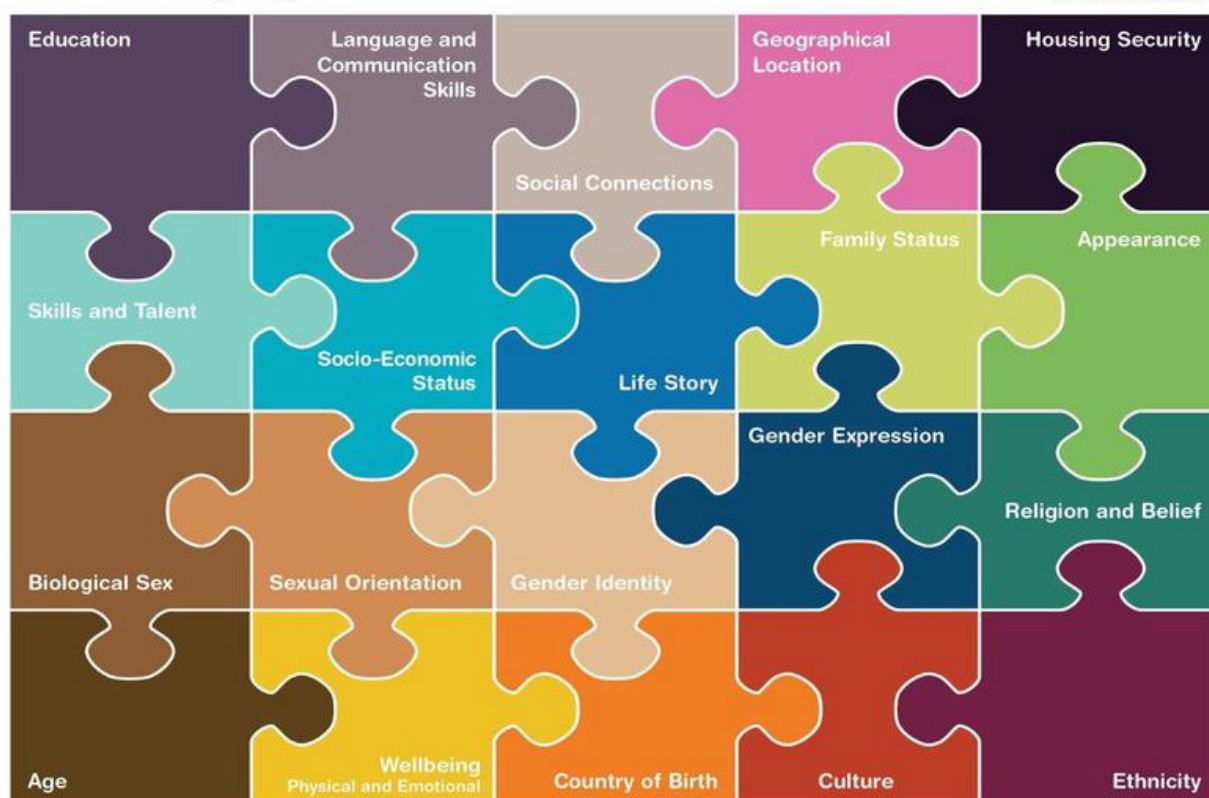


## Person Centred Care

Person centred care involves thinking and doing things in a way that puts people, their experiences, well-being, preferences and needs at the centre of the caring process. People are experts in their own lives and it is important to recognise and value each person as a unique individual, shaped by their personal characteristics, experiences, values and beliefs.

How we involve people in the caring process requires us to work with the person, providing choice and enabling them to be in control. Our approach should involve sharing power and responsibility, seeing people as partners in the planning, delivery and review of care and ensuring that people are at the centre of decisions that affect their care.

## The Diversity Jigsaw



## Bridges Celebrates Not Tolerates

To create an inclusive environment it is important that people are comfortable to be themselves and know they are appreciated and respected. Therefore, it is important that Bridges celebrates who people are. Tolerating people's difference or their diversity isn't being inclusive. To "tolerate" something or someone implies that they are less than you and while you will endure their difference it is not your preference or enjoyable. To "accept" someone does not promote inclusive behaviour. By "accepting them" you are highlighting their difference as a deficit and demonstrating a power imbalance between you (the mainstream/normal) and them who is different. Organisations and staff should not be tolerant or accepting, but instead be welcoming and embracing.

This resource was developed with help from the EMR Alliance

# Appendix B

## Bridges Inclusion Risk Management Plan

The Risk: What can happen and how it can happen	The consequences of an event happening		Adequacy of existing controls
	Consequences	Likelihood	
General comments which are not welcoming to people from minority groups or discriminatory comments - due to lack of training or disrespect of certain groups	Workplace and services potentially not welcoming or safe for LGBTI clients, volunteers and staff. Could create a bad reputation or potentially be unlawful	Almost certain	Feedback process, training, communications around what is acceptable and what counts as discrimination
Failure to adhere to the confidentiality policy eg. Gossiping about sexuality. Due to lack of understanding of policy and importance.	Workplace and services potentially not welcoming or safe for LGBTI clients, volunteers and staff. Could create a bad reputation or potentially be unlawful	Unlikely	Strong policy and training in how it related to LGBTI community
Discrimination of individuals based on sexuality, gender or race. Due to inadequate training, failure to follow procedures.	Not adhering to law or policies. Exclusion of individuals from service. Not a safe environment.	Possible	Health & Safety policy, health & safety procedures, training, internal health & safety reviews
Documents and induction process are not inclusive due to incomplete audit	Clients are dissuaded from accessing service	Likely	Working through audit
Assumptions made about individuals which are not inclusive, eg. Heteronormativity due to not enough training	Bad reputation as we have said we are inclusive	Almost certain	Preliminary training for staff
Carers who are not supportive of LGBTI clients intervene in project due to differing opinions	Clients not supported by carers, may not be safe to come out	Rare	Nothing
Vocal dissent about the Inclusion Project from staff, volunteers or board due to differing opinions or lack of understanding of project	Individuals influence others to have lack of respect for project, contributes to a bad culture, inclusion project not as affective as it could be	Almost certain	Preliminary training for staff, FAQs document circulated to staff
Negative client feedback because our communications say we are inclusive however their experience with staff/volunteers is negative. Due to lack of training for staff/volunteers or lack of support for project.	Not adhering to law or policies. Exclusion of individuals from service. Not a safe environment.	Likely	Preliminary training for staff, FAQs document circulated to staff
Subcontractors are not inclusive in service delivery, eg. tech and I.T support, plumbing etc, due to lack of communication with contractors about our expectations	Not inclusive for staff	Unlikely	Some posters displayed
Building not inclusive eg. not gender neutral toilets	Not inclusive	Rare	Staff office has neutral toilet
Incorrect pronouns used for individuals	Not inclusive and discriminatory	Likely	Training and policy to ask for pronouns

Consequence rating	Level of risk	Treatment
Critical	Extreme	<p><b>First step</b> = Calling out language in the moment and/or speaking one on one with the person, asking for a commitment that this behaviour will not reoccur. Touching base with any other individuals that could be affected. Monitor actions and reassess. Take notes of progress.</p> <p><b>Second step</b> = Formal warning on record and actions taken to protect those that may be affected. Training organised.</p> <p><b>Third step</b> = Disciplinary action required eg. external training, performance review or termination.</p> <p><b>Reduce likelihood</b> = Training and one on one conversations.</p>
Major	Medium	<p>Conversation with CEO and training on policy.</p> <p><b>Reduce likelihood</b> = Training in policy including scenarios</p>
Critical	Medium	<p>Disciplinary action depending on severity.</p> <p><b>Reduce likelihood</b> = Training and awareness</p>
	Low	<p>If notified of non-inclusive document, make changes ASAP.</p> <p><b>Reduce likelihood</b> = Review all documents</p>
Major	Extreme	<p>Asking for client/volunteer feedback.</p> <p><b>Reduce likelihood</b> = Training and awareness</p>
Moderate	Medium	<p>Review confidentiality processes. Conversation between Project Officer and carer.</p> <p><b>Reduce likelihood</b> = Communications with carers group, general communications strong, good confidentiality</p>
Critical	Extreme	<p>1:1 conversation, call out disrespect in the moment.</p> <p><b>Reduce likelihood</b> = 1:1 conversations and additional training, circulate FAQs document to volunteers, expand on FAQs document</p>
Critical	High	<p>Call client and have a conversation about their needs and expectations, talk with staff/volunteer involved.</p> <p><b>Reduce likelihood</b> = 1:1 conversations and additional training, circulate inclusive language document</p>
Moderate	Medium	<p>Phone call or email from CEO explaining inappropriate behaviour and making expectations clear.</p> <p><b>Reduce likelihood</b> = Clear signage that we are an inclusive organisation, contracts to include expectations around behaviours in the workplace</p>
Minor	Low	<p>Neutral toilets available at venues is something to consider into the future</p>
Moderate	Medium	<p>Staff to let volunteers know of client pronouns. If occurs apologise and make effort not to misgender individual again. Ensure that individuals this person works with are inclusive. Additional training.</p>

**It is only with the effort and commitment  
of our devoted volunteers that we are  
able to provide such quality service.**

**If you are interested in being a volunteer  
please contact us on 03 9763 9700**



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