

spring • 2007

● glbt health & wellbeing

shine

HEAVEN BENT

Help support our Angels

GOLDEN QUEERS

The trouble with being gay & grey

HOME TRUTHS

Outing same sex domestic violence

PARTY FAVOURS

Out and about with the ACON Rovers

equality • empathy • partnership • community • diversity • courage

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BUILDING OUR COMMUNITY'S
HEALTH & WELLBEING

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SHINE ON!

Welcome to the first edition of *SHINE*, a new biannual magazine from ACON.

ACON promotes the health and wellbeing of NSW's gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community. We also provide information and support for people living with HIV or at risk of acquiring HIV, including sex workers and injecting drug users.

In 1985, ACON began as the AIDS Council of NSW and since then has been a world leader in the fight against HIV/AIDS. For the past seven years, we've also taken a wider role by promoting the general health and wellbeing of the entire GLBT community.

Why? Because the community we serve has specific health needs that are not always met through mainstream channels due to a lack of knowledge, understanding and acceptance.

So while we have a



ACON staff show off ACON's new logo.

central focus on HIV/AIDS, ACON's work also covers such areas as sexual health, alcohol and other drugs, lesbian health, mental health, ageing, anti-violence, counseling, community care and advocacy.

To help people better understand how ACON has evolved, the organisation's visual identity has recently been updated. It's a bold departure from our old identity as an AIDS Council, which we hope will now allow us to paint the full picture of what we

do and why we do it.

We also rely a lot on fundraising to finance our broader GLBT health work. Our latest fundraising campaign asks people to "Help support our Angels!" – the angels being ACON staff who are working hard to help build our community's health and wellbeing. Check out p14 or the ad on the back cover to find out more. And we hope you enjoy reading *SHINE*.

MICHAEL BADORREK
EDITOR

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GROWING UP AND OUT

Teenage years are difficult at the best of times. But when you discover you're battling for the same team, there's a lot more at stake.

"I grew up being told to hate poofers," says Courtney, a 20-year-old man from Western Sydney. The youngest of four boys, he worked out he was gay in his early teens, but quickly discovered there was no room for being different – either at home or at school.

"I grew up in a pretty blokey family," he recalls. "And I'd seen what the older boys at school did to anyone they thought was gay – it wasn't good."

Courtney lived in a constant state of fear about the secret of his sexuality being revealed and eventually found a damaging outlet for his stress.

"I would cut myself on my leg or arm," he says. "I really hated the fact I was gay and thought lots about killing myself. I saw no future for me."

Courtney's case is not uncommon. In fact, such trauma is typical for many same-sex attracted adolescent boys and girls as they attempt to come to terms with their sexual identity.

While recent studies suggest there has been a shift in the past

10 years for same-sex attracted youth towards more positive feelings about their sexuality, a range of abuse and social problems still exist.

Ben Bavinton, one of ACON's youth team leaders, says the abuse young gay men and lesbians experience extends from name-calling and insults through to physical attacks which require hospitalisation. Most of this abuse occurs at school.

"A lot of same-sex attracted youth really struggle with the prejudice and abuse they experience," he says. "As a result, they're more likely than their straight counterparts to practise unsafe sex, start using drugs, self-harm or attempt suicide."

To counter this, ACON has in place a range of strategies to help young same-sex attracted people understand that it's okay to be gay.

"Programs like the Fun & Esteem Project for young gay men and our Young Women's Project teach a range of personal development skills like dealing with homophobia, coming out,

safe sex education and creating support networks with other young queer people," Ben says.

When Courtney was admitted to hospital after a serious self-harm incident, he shared his secret with one of the counsellors. She recommended he get in touch with ACON. After a few false starts, he began attending some workshops and social events.

"It was the best thing I've ever done," he says. "I started meeting all these other young guys and girls who were all going through exactly the same thing. This huge weight was lifted off my shoulders. It was great."

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

We could help more young people by promoting our programs more widely in high schools. But we don't have the funding. Want to help? Check out p14.



INS AND OUT

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HOME TRUTHS

For GLBT people, escaping an abusive partner can be even harder because the system is not adequately equipped to help.

Lucy, 27, had been in a relationship with her girlfriend for several years.

The once happy union between the two Newcastle women turned sour once Lucy's partner became emotionally abusive.

It was when the problems developed to physical violence that Lucy decided she had to get out.

"I had nowhere to go because my girlfriend had isolated me from all my friends," Lucy recalls. "So I went to a women's refuge.

"I was falling apart emotionally. But because my partner was a woman, no one knew how to help me."

When her ex-partner began stalking her, Lucy decided to take out an AVO.

Arriving at the courthouse, she wanted to avoid any contact with her ex and headed to the safety of the women's room. Also waiting there was her ex.

"I waited outside but had to endure her abuse every time she walked past. It was awful."

While the issue of domestic violence has attracted more attention in recent years, there has been little discussion about same-sex domestic violence (SSDV).

This is often due to the assumption it simply doesn't happen in same-sex relationships or it's not as serious because a person of the same gender is better placed to defend themselves.

In *Fair's Fair*, a groundbreaking report on SSDV compiled by ACON and the SSDV Working Group, it was found that the level and types of domestic violence in same-sex relationships are similar to those in the heterosexual community.

Carl Harris, from ACON's Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project, says the report shows up to a third of the people surveyed had experienced violence or abuse at the hands of a partner.

"But the report also shows GLBT people experiencing domestic violence don't access general services," he says.

"We believe this is because the relevant authorities can't provide them with an appropriate service due to a lack of knowledge, understanding and acceptance of gay and lesbian relationships.

"For example, lesbians can access most general services like women's refuges and court assistance schemes but these

services often have little or no experience in working with SSDV and so the effectiveness of the service is significantly reduced.

"For gay men, the services simply don't exist."

He says ACON is attempting to address SSDV by running campaigns to raise awareness within the GLBT community.

"But we need training programs so police, legal and healthcare workers are better equipped to deal with this type of violence.

"It's basically a matter of social equity so that the needs of GLBT people are afforded the same level of respect as any other group."

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

A full-time SSDV Officer is needed so relevant government agencies and community groups are trained in dealing with SSDV. But we need your help. Check out page 14 for details.

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(NOT SO) HAPPY AND GAY

Every year, Sydney's annual Mardi Gras parade is filled with happy smiling faces. But for many people in the GLBT community, life is not always so gay and carefree.

Mental health has become a much bigger issue in Australia in recent years, with almost 20 per cent of the population experiencing a range of psychological issues (ABS figures).

But in the GLBT community, this rate more than doubles. In the past five years, over 50 per cent of people have sought professional help for anxiety or depression.

"Just because of their sexuality, some GLBT people are cut off from their families and friends, denied basic legal and social entitlements, bullied at school or in the workplace, abused by their neighbours or bashed on the street," Kerry Saloner, ACON's Head of Counselling, says.

"As a result, there are increased rates of homelessness, risk-taking behaviour, depression, self-harm and suicide."

Saheesh, 31, moved to Australia to escape ethnic tensions as well as India's notorious persecution of homosexuals, but was kicked out of home when his brother found

out he was gay.

With no job, due to visa problems, and no place to go, he ended up sleeping on the steps of St Mary's Cathedral in Sydney.

"I would think all the time that maybe I should kill myself," he says. "I could not get help from the Indian community because I did not want to cause any more trouble for my brother who is well known in the community."

He eventually found his way to ACON and started seeing a counsellor.

"It was very helpful to have someone to talk to about my problems – someone who really understood what it was like."

The ACON counsellors encouraged him to join some other groups and workshops that ACON runs to help him make connections and friendships in the community.

"I am much more confident now and am happy to say I am a gay. When I come to ACON I feel myself relax – it feels like family to me."

Many people from the GLBT

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

A dedicated Intake Officer would allow our counsellors to help more people. But we don't have the funding. Check out p14 for how you can help.

community, especially people newly diagnosed or living with HIV, turn to ACON in times of emotional crisis because of the counselling team's experience in dealing with the relevant issues.

"We never turn people away," Kerry says. "But due to a lack of resources, we have to put non-critical clients on a waiting list, which is not ideal because, if people don't get the help they need, then the problems they're experiencing could become worse."

MAY THE ROVERS BE WITH YOU

Helping keep partygoers safe is the job of the ACON Rovers, a team of specially trained and dedicated volunteers.

PARTNERSHIP
alcohol and
other drugs



ACON Rover
Peter Baldwin

Everyone wants to have a good time when they're out and about, and it's a fact of life that for some people, this means drinking alcohol and/or taking illicit drugs.

Research from the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre shows gay men and lesbians use more drugs more often than the general population.

While there are a variety of complex social and personal reasons for this, studies show that escaping from the harsh realities of living in a homophobic society is a major contributing factor for many GLBT people.

The ACON Rovers program was created in 2003 in an effort to reduce some of the harms associated with alcohol and other drug use in the GLBT community.

Rovers attend a range of major events ensuring that people are partying in a safe environment where support is on hand.

Rovers give their time for free and are trained to be the eyes of medical teams at parties.

Aside from keeping an eye on partygoers, Rovers also offer information on alcohol and drugs, assist with general first aid and help out with lost property.

This volunteer program has been one of ACON's greatest

success stories, acclaimed not only by party patrons, but also party producers for the additional safety it provides for their events.

Peter Baldwin, one of ACON's longest-serving Rovers, shares his story.

"I began as a Rover four years ago because my partner and I thought it was a way of putting into practice some of the things the gay community should be doing to look after ourselves.

The need for ACON Rovers exists because there's no point saying 'don't take drugs' because people do and it's better to acknowledge that and potentially save lives. So we take a harm minimisation approach: if people do decide to party, they have access to information and services that will allow them to do it as safely as possible.

What I get out of being a Rover is knowing I can make a difference. It's really satisfying knowing that I can help prevent someone going into a coma from an overdose. Most people also really appreciate the advice we offer in relation to alcohol and drug use because they realise the information can help them and their friends avoid a potentially tragic situation.

The most memorable time I had as a Rover was at a recent party when a young guy was sitting drunk and very depressed. He said how horrible his life was and that he was tempted to kill himself there and then. I talked to him and got him back to his friends. I saw him again the next day and he gave me a big kiss and said, 'Thank you for helping me.' That makes it all worthwhile."

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

It costs thousands of dollars to train and manage the ACON Rovers. But we receive no government funding for the program so we need your help. Check out p14 to find out more.



James and Brian in their garden at Kogarah

GOLDEN QUEERS

The older people of the GLBT community run the risk of being the most invisible and least cared for of all senior groups in the country.

Brian and James have been together for 10 years.

Brian is 67 and James 71, and the couple proudly say theirs is a loving, vibrant and caring relationship.

While both Sydney men admit they have been open for years about being gay, they say the times are changing.

Now in need of a wider range of healthcare services due to their age, Brian and James confess they feel they cannot always be honest about their relationship when dealing with mainstream health providers.

"We've started telling people that we're brothers because it makes the process easier," Brian explains.

"There's a whole lot of legal problems we face as a couple because our relationship isn't given the same legal recognition that straight couples get.

"And while people are becoming more used to seeing young gay and lesbian couples, older gay couples are a bit of an unknown quantity.

"Some people seem uncomfortable in knowing how to deal with us. So, now we hide the truth."

A lack of care as they grow older and the need for informed support are the major concerns for Brian and James, and for most senior GLBT people in our community.

In fact, Australia's first generation of openly gay and lesbian citizens is fast approaching retirement age, and many will soon be requiring specialist aged care.

However, ACON CEO Stevie Clayton says we know very little about the health needs of older GLBT people due to an almost complete lack of specific research.

"Australian governments recognise the importance of responding to the diversity of the aged population in order to implement healthy ageing policies," she says.

"But it's extremely rare for government policy or strategy to acknowledge the existence of older GLBT people or the obstacles they face in older age.

"Rarely do they ask older Australians questions in research about their sexuality because of issues relating to sensitivity and embarrassment," Clayton explains.

"But this information is vital to the health needs of not only the GLBT community, but our society as a whole and it beggars belief that these questions are not being asked."

Another issue is a lack of family support.

Most GLBT people are without children and, in many cases, estranged from family networks.

As a result, many older GLBT men and women only have their partners and social network of friends to rely on as their needs become greater.

Most, however, live alone. In fact, research shows that up to 90 per cent of older gay men live alone.

Consequently, GLBT support groups and social networks play an important part in the physical and emotional wellbeing of older GLBT people.

“AT OUR AGE, WE’VE JUST GOT USED TO THE FREEDOMS A MORE TOLERANT SOCIETY PROVIDES. TO HAVE THAT TAKEN AWAY IS A PRETTY CRUEL PROSPECT.”

Wendy is 72 and lived with her partner Marian in the Blue Mountains for 34 years.

Marian provided the assistance Wendy needed whenever she was crippled by arthritis.

Since Marian’s death last year, Wendy says a network of friends have cared for her.

“Most of these friends are my age,” she says.

“As that support network becomes smaller, that’s when I really begin to worry what is going to become of me.

“I know I eventually might require care in a nursing home but I’m not sure how comfortable I will feel with people who might not approve of me.

“However, if there was an option of a gay and lesbian nursing home or retirement village, I don’t think I’d be so concerned.”

Stevie Clayton says to meet the needs of older GLBT people, both the practice and culture of aged care will need to change.

“The issue is of particular relevance to church-based and religious organisations that provide aged care because, under current legislation, these groups are allowed to discriminate against GLBT people despite the fact they receive public money.

“Processes must be put in place to overcome the potential for conflict that this situation represents.”

To help address many of the challenges posed by an ageing population, ACON has developed the Healthy GLBT Ageing Strategy.

It highlights the priority health needs that exist for older GLBT people and makes recommendations on how these needs can be met.

It also promotes informed health awareness for older GLBT people so they know what public resources are available to them.

ACON is now working with a range of government agencies, business organisations and

community groups to implement the strategy to ensure older GLBT people get the information, services and respect to which they are entitled.

James, the partner of Brian, says, “The thought of one or both of us ending up in a place where we’re not welcome is something that really does concern us.

“At our age, we’ve just got used to the freedoms a more tolerant society provides.

“To have that taken away is a pretty cruel prospect.”

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

A full-time Ageing Officer would help us improve services for older GLBT people. But we don’t have the funding. Check out p14 for how to help.





Image: Ann-Marie Callihanna

Members of Sydney Convicts rugby team hit the venues on Oxford St to help promote ACON's latest STI campaign



The winners of the recent ACON All Stars Sydney Women's Baseball League tournament



COMMUNITY

At the opening night of Bonds Of Love, a play created and performed by Salam Namaste, a support group for GLBT people with South Asian heritage



Image: Ann-Marie Callihanna

Passengers on the recent NaviGAYtion cruise were kept safe by a team of ACON Rovers



Members of MAG (Mature Age Gays) at one of their regular functions



Members of the ACON-supported Asian Marching Boys perform at the recent Faces of Asia fundraiser



Participants at ACON's recent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health retreat at Thullii Dreaming near Wollombi



DIVERSITY
rural and regional

Ben Cooper in Lismore

OUT IN THE STICKS

Meet Ben Cooper, Lismore's award-winning Queer Peer volunteer worker.

For his volunteer work as part of ACON's Queer Peer Project, Ben Cooper recently won the Community Support Award at the Lismore Kids in the Community Awards.

The Project, which commenced two years ago, equips queer youth in rural areas with the knowledge, skills and networks they need to help other young gay men and lesbians in their community.

Earlier this year, Ben founded the Lismore Activists for Same Sex Equality (LASSE), a group dedicated to social community and constitutional equality.

We spoke with Ben to discover the driving force behind his passion.

SHINE: What is a Queer Peer?

BEN COOPER: A Queer Peer is a non-heterosexual young person who works with young queer people so they can lead happier and healthier lives and contribute to the development of their community.

Why did you get involved in the Queer Peer Project?

Schoolyard homophobia makes

it extremely difficult for young queers to access the queer youth community and the accepting local community. I got involved in an effort to change that on a local level.

Has being a Queer Peer helped you help others?

Yes, the program has taught me many skills in regards to supporting queer youth and being an activist.

What would make life better for GLBT people in rural areas?

Safety, acceptance and recognition of the existence of queers and their kids, particularly in schools. Also having safe places that are well known within each major rural community for queers would help end isolation and bring the queer community together.

What does winning the Kids in the Community Award mean to you?

It shows two things. The first is it recognises that Northern Rivers folk do support young queers' safety and equality to the point they're handing out awards. Secondly it shows there's

been a shift in attitudes towards non-heterosexuals. More people think it's unjust for governments, churches, workplaces and schools to continue to not recognise the existence of queer adolescents and children and to pass legislation that discriminates against them.

What are your plans for the future?

I would like to campaign for the mandatory teaching in high schools of queer sex education, queer history and anti-homophobia programs.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

The funding has ceased for the Queer Peer Project. But ACON would like to continue its success. Check out p14 to find out how you can help.



HELP OUT

Helping people in our community look after their health and wellbeing is what ACON is all about.

HIV/AIDS is one of the biggest health issues facing our community, and NSW Health gives ACON about \$7.2 million annually to run prevention and education campaigns and to help look after people living with HIV.

But while HIV/AIDS remains a major concern, there are many other serious health and welfare issues which also affect our community. However, the money

ACON receives from NSW Health can only be spent on work related to HIV/AIDS.

Therefore, we rely on a range of fundraising activities, as well as the support of our fantastic group of volunteers, to carry out all the other work we do.

From as little as \$20 a month, you can help support a range of services for queer youth (see p4) and older GLBT people (see p10), reduce the problem of same-sex domestic violence (see p6), counsel people experiencing anxiety and depression (see p8)

and help people understand the risks associated with alcohol and drug use (see p9) – as well as a whole lot more!

Or you can volunteer some of your time and expertise for one of the many programs, projects or events that we run.

If ACON is to continue the job of building our community's health and wellbeing, we can't do it alone. Want to help out? Check out the options below or contact our Fundraising Manager Brad Timms on (02) 9206 2107 or btimms@acon.org.au.

Community Fundraising

The organisers of many big parties and events generously support ACON by donating a portion of ticket sales. Now you can help out too by running your own fundraising event. It might be a trivia or karaoke night at your local pub, a bike ride in the mountains with your sporting club or maybe a Melbourne Cup lunch. Big or small, the fundraising possibilities are endless. For more information, visit www.acon.org.au/communityfundraising.

Bequests

Leaving something to ACON in your will is a gracious and generous parting gesture that can make a significant difference in the lives of many people in our community. For more information, visit www.acon.org.au/bequests or call (02) 9206 2022.

Help support our Angels

From as little as \$10 a month, you can support our ACON angels and help them help others in our community. You can donate a set amount of money every month through a direct debit from either your bank account or credit card, plus your donation will be deductible. ACON relies on angels like you to continue our work. For more information, visit www.acon.org.au/angels or call (02) 9206 2022.

Bingay

Join your hostesses, drag diva Mitzi MacIntosh and singing sensation Naomi Palmer, for hilarious fun and games every Tuesday night at the Imperial Hotel. And for an even bigger laugh, check out Big Bingay. There's a Halloween edition on Friday, October 26 at the Paddington RSL and a Christmas Cracker in December at the Imperial. For bookings call (02) 9519 9899.

Red Ribbon Appeal

Preparations have already begun for the 2007 Red Ribbon Day Appeal, ACON's major fundraising event for the year. On Friday, November 30, ACON will be selling Red Ribbon merchandise throughout NSW and we need as many volunteers as possible to make and sell the ribbons. For more information, visit www.redribbonday.org.au.

Volunteering

Whether they're carers, counsellors, performers, fundraisers, administrative assistants or project workers, ACON volunteers play a vital and valued role in our organisation right across NSW. But there's always more work that can be done. So if you want to make a difference in your community, call Kim on (02) 9206 2022 or email volunteers@acon.org.au.



use condoms with water based lube

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keep it **slippery when wet...**
plenty of lube can help prevent
condoms from breaking

Help support our angels

Nicky

ACON's Alcohol & Other Drugs Project Manager

Nicky and a large team of volunteer Rovers attend a range of events, assisting people to party safely. At ACON hundreds of our angels provide a range of services and programs that are as diverse as the community we serve. By committing to a regular donation of as little as \$10 per month, you can support our angels' work.

As a non-government, community organisation ACON depends on the support of individuals like you*. Your ongoing gift will ensure that we have the funding available to build these vital services and plan for the future.

**To support ACON's work in building
the health and wellbeing of our community visit
www.acon.org.au/angels or call 9206 2022 .**

*ACON receives government funding primarily for HIV/AIDS-related work

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