LGBTIQ INCLUSION
AT BENALLA P-12 COLLEGE
US PRIDE GROUP

## BENALLA P-12 COLLEGEAT A GLANCE:

**School type:** P-12

**School sector:** Government

**DET Region:** North East Victoria Region

**DET Area:** Ovens Murray

**Enrolments:** 888

**Staff:** 125

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| LGBTIQ inclusion training |  |
| LGBTIQ inclusion policies |  |
| LGBTIQ student group |  |
| LGBTIQ community partnership |  |

### KEY INFORMATION

* Benalla P-12 College has worked to build greater inclusivity for LGBTIQ students over the past two years, in response to student need.
* The College partnered with the Diversity Project, Uniting Goulburn North East, to provide ongoing, on-campus support to students who identify as LGBTIQ.
* A student group named Us Pride has been a highly successful component of this on-campus support.
* The students who participate in the group report an increased sense of safety and belonging since joining.
* Staff and student feedback, as well as Attitudes to School Survey data, suggests there has been a shift towards increased inclusion and respect in the school community.

## CONTEXT

The College has three campuses: the Faithfull Campus, Waller Campus and Avon Campus, and has a total enrolment of 896 students. Koorie students make up 7% of enrolments, and 1% of the student cohort speak English as an additional language. The College offers a variety of sports and music activities as well as VCE, VCAL, and VET programs. The College promotes core values of Respect, Responsibility, Integrity, and High Expectations, and states its primary aim is to know and value each and every student. The College places strong emphasis on building a culture that supports student wellbeing. The College has embedded the School Wide Positive Behaviour framework into its teaching practices, as well as a robust social and emotional curriculum. In addition, the school engages in awareness campaigns designed to promote wellbeing such as Bullying No Way, RUOK Day, and Respectful Relationships. Recognising Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and gender diverse, Intersex, Queer and questioning (LGBTIQ) inclusivity as a critical component of supporting student wellbeing, the college has proactively engaged in building and embedding inclusive practices throughout all areas of the school. This has included teacher training, policy review, development of gender-neutral facilities and uniforms, and providing specialised support and programming for LGBTIQ students.

“Recognising that a minority group does need to be celebrated and supported is integral to the work you can do as an educator”

–Diversity Project Case Worker

## ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

In 2018, the College launched an LGBTIQ student group named Us Pride. The name was chosen by students to align with an existing Koorie student group named Us Mob. The group was launched during Victorian Youth Week via a year 7-12 Pride Day involving a guest speaker from the LGBTIQ community, a free BBQ provided by the local Lions and Rotary clubs, face painting, rainbow dress-ups, and games.

The Us Pride group is a lunchtime peer support group open to all LGBTIQ students and allies. The purpose of the group is to provide a safe and supportive space where LGBTIQ students and allies can connect, have fun, offer mutual support, and work together to promote LGBTIQ inclusivity throughout the wider school community. The Us Pride group meets every two weeks during lunchtime and is resourced by the school’s Wellbeing Officer, in partnership with an external case worker from the Diversity Project, Uniting Goulburn North East. As well as resourcing the group the Diversity Project provide Us Pride members on-going case management, as well as connecting them with community events and support services.

Us Pride has grown to have a membership of 16 students, who range from years 8 to 12. According to the students, the Us Pride group has given them a sense of strength and belonging within the school and has had a positive impact on the school culture as a whole. Since the establishment of the Us Pride group, members have noticed less homophobic language in the grounds, more students ‘coming out’, and more teachers verbalising their support for LGBTIQ students.

*“It’s amazing because you can have so much fun. There is no judgement whatsoever”*

– Student

### GOALS

* To build the capacity of Benalla P-12 College staff to support LGBTIQ students.
* To reduce homophobic, transphobic and interphobic behaviours amongst the student cohort.
* To provide information and emotional support to individual LGBTIQ students.
* To create an environment where LGBTIQ students feel safe and included.

## BACKGROUND

In 2018, a small group of students expressed a need for greater support and inclusion of LGBTIQ students within Benalla P-12 College. The students explained to the Wellbeing staff that they felt alienated and targeted within the school. They also wanted support to create more equality, respect and inclusion within their school community. The Wellbeing staff responded immediately by enlisting help from outside services.

Safe Schools provided teacher training and support to review key policies and the Diversity Project was engaged to provide on-campus support including student workshops. The Diversity Project located a case worker on-site at the school one day per fortnight. As well as providing case management to individual students, the worker supported staff and student understanding of gender, sex and sexuality; inclusive language; and challenging homophobic, transphobic and interphobic behaviours. In partnership with the school Wellbeing Officer, the Diversity Project worker also developed the Us Pride student group which has had a consistent and growing membership for the past two years.

*“It’s very much driven by the needs of the kids, I think that’s the most important thing for us”*

– Principal

### HIGHLIGHTS

The College Principal and Wellbeing staff identify the sustained success of the Us Pride student group as the key highlight from the College’s efforts. The group has been meeting consistently for two years, with a robust membership that includes participants from a range of secondary year levels. Both staff and students alike believe the presence of the Us Pride group has not only provided valuable support to LGBTIQ students but has also impacted positively on the school culture as a whole – increasing safety and wellbeing for all.

“The thing I’m most proud of about our inclusion work is that it’s come from the students.

– Principal

## KEY SUCCESS ENABLERS

The primary success enabler is the school’s close partnership with the Diversity Project, Uniting Goulburn North East. The Diversity Project brought expertise, resources, and an effective practice model to the school campus that was not available within the school community, nor the town of Benalla. The partnership has been of great benefit to the students, as they are able to access more specialist expertise through the Diversity Project when required.

Another key success enabler of the Us Pride group is that it is a student driven initiative.

Finally, the unwavering support for LGBTIQ inclusivity from the school leadership team has been critical in allowing the initiative to gain strength and momentum.

### KEY CHALLENGES

The school has faced some negative feedback from community members regarding some inclusion initiatives. The school leadership has responded to this feedback by meeting with the community members face to face and explaining the importance of LGBTIQ inclusion in schools. The school leadership saw such complaints as opportunities to educate the school community about the importance of:

* Supporting all students to succeed in their education
* Abiding by anti-discrimination laws and Department of Education and Training LGBTIQ Student Support policy
* Fulfilling the schools core values.

## MEASURES OF SUCCESS

Staff and students describe a cultural shift within the school since actively engaging in LGBTIQ inclusion. Anecdotal feedback from staff and students indicates teachers are standing up against homophobic, transphobic and interphobic behaviour and language more, homophobic bullying has declined, students are feeling safer, and more students and staff are proudly expressing their LGBTIQ identities.

Data from the 2018 and 2019 Attitude to Schools Survey provides quantitative evidence of this positive cultural shift, which correlates with the Us Pride group and the work of the Wellbeing staff to support LGBTIQ inclusion. Key data is summarised as follows:

* Students from years 7-9 reported an improvement in the ‘Advocate at School’ factor from 58% positive in 2018, to 65% positive in 2019
* Students from year 10-12 saw the same measure improve from 53% positive in 2018 to 68% in 2019
* The ‘Respect for Diversity’ factor at Year 7-9 remained stable at 34% positive from 2018 to 2019
* Students from year 10-12 reported an increase in ‘Respect for Diversity’ from 34% positive in 2018 to 39% positive in 2019.

## OPTIONS FOR SCALABILITY

### BENALLA P-12 COLLEGE

The College is committed to continuing to support and expand the membership of the Us Pride group and strengthening LGBTIQ inclusion throughout the school. A key strategy in achieving this is the school’s annual day of LGBTIQ celebration known as Us Pride Day, where the group is promoted and celebrated.

### AT OTHER SCHOOLS

The College’s Us Pride group offers a successful model of a student driven LGBTIQ support group that could be replicated in other Victorian schools. However, the Us Pride model requires a strong partnership with a community agency offering specialist resources and expertise. Such a partnership may or may not be available to other Victorian schools.

Benalla P-12 College is interested in connecting the Us Pride group with LGBTIQ student groups in neighbouring schools, and in the wider community. The Diversity Project works with schools and youth services across the Goulburn Valley, and in doing so is well placed to facilitate networking between student groups. Time and staff capacity will be important considerations in implementing this idea.

## MAPPING TO FRAMEWORK FOR IMPROVING STUDENT OUTCOMES

### EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

* Implementation of Respectful Relationships
* LGBTIQ inclusion training for all staff
* LGBTIQ books and references available in school libraries
* Health and PE staff have received professional learning regarding gender, sex and sexuality
* Student workshops around LGBTIQ inclusion

### A CULTURE OF PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP

* Resourcing LGBTIQ inclusion and support
* Targeted communications to combat offensive language
* Students know which staff members are active allies and can go to them for support
* Principal and leadership team publicly message school as LGBTIQ inclusive including through social media and the school website
* Significant days are celebrated and messaged publicly
* Principal attends and speaks at significant days

### POSITIVE CLIMATE FOR LEARNING

* LGBTIQ student group
* Inclusive policies and processes
* Formal processes for supporting students through disclosure
* All gender bathrooms
* Visual inclusion cues (stickers, lanyards, email signatures, pronoun sharing etc.)
* Staff are trained to respond to homophobic, transphobic and interphobic bullying
* Uniform policies are gender neutral and explicitly reference trans, gender diverse and non-binary students
* Safe spaces for LGBTIQ students

### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN LEARNING

* Partnerships with LGBTIQ specific services and organisations
* Referral pathways for student support
* Engagement with Safe Schools teams
* Significant days e.g. IDAHOBIT and Wear it Purple are open to the community
* LGBTIQ people speak at school assemblies and special events

“That feeling of being included and being safe goes beyond the school grounds outside into the whole community”

– Wellbeing Officer

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| VIDEO DESCRIPTIONThe video includes footage of the Us Pride group in action, as well as testimonials from students, school Principal, Wellbeing Officer, and the Diversity Project Case Worker regarding the success of the group. |

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