LGBTIQ INCLUSION  
AT BENDIGO SENIOR SECONDARY COLLEGE

### **THE ALLY NETWORK**

## BENDIGO SENIOR SECONDARY COLLEGE AT A GLANCE:

**School type:** Senior Secondary – Year 11 & 12

**School sector:** Government

**DET Region:** North West Victoria Region

**DET Area:** Loddon Campaspe

**Enrolments:** 1778

**Staff:** 190

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

### KEY INFORMATION

* Bendigo Senior Secondary College (BSSC) have a network of staff ‘Allies’ who receive specialised training and drive LGBTIQ inclusion including through the provision of support to students.
* The Ally Network works with BSSC’s LGBTIQ student group to strive for excellence in LGBTIQ inclusion.
* The Ally Network was awarded ‘Pride Inclusion Initiative of the Year’ at the 2019 Victorian Public Sector Pride Awards.
* BSSC will continue to mentor schools who choose to implement this approach.

## CONTEXT

Bendigo Senior Secondary College (BSSC) is a Year 11 & 12 school located in one of Victoria’s strongest and fastest growing regional areas.

Founded in 1907, BSSC is situated in central Bendigo overlooking the historic Rosalind Park. With over 1700 students, it is the largest provider of the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) and Vocational Education and Training in Schools (VETiS) in the state.

The college offers a rich learning environment specifically tailored to meet the needs of young adults and help them achieve their potential. BSSC provides an adult environment where sound work ethics, self-discipline and independent learning skills are fostered. A range of online courses and self-directed learning options are available to students who would prefer to learn at their own pace. Our students are recognised state-wide for their outstanding results including VCE Premiers Awards and the VCE Season of Excellence Awards.

BSSC believes their role is to empower learners for individual, community and global leadership. Their values are: Respect, Optimism, Learning, Environment.

*“I am safe and free to be open with other people”*

–Student

## ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

When BSSC developed their strategic plan in 2017, they identified a positive climate for learning as one of their state-wide priorities. The high-impact improvement initiative they focused specifically on was setting expectations and promoting inclusion. It was from here that several minority groups were chosen, one being the LGBTIQ community. The LGBTIQ Ally network eventually evolved from this.

The school initially consulted with representatives from the local LGBTIQ community to source ideas and information. They spoke with other schools who were already doing good work in supporting LGBTIQ students. However, they found that inclusive practise only seemed to incorporate a support group for students, occasional LGBTIQ inclusion training for staff, some rainbow stickers and the celebration of the LGBTIQ community through a one off event.

BSSC wanted to go one step further and began contacting tertiary institutions to find out what they were doing. They eventually landed on Latrobe University’s Ally Network where staff and students receive training and can opt to be an official ‘ally’. This means providing information, support and referrals for LGBTIQ people across the organisation. Given that BSSC is a senior campus and thus has similarities to an adult learning environment, the school chose to take a similar approach.

Initially all school staff were trained with a one-hour foundation session provided by Safe Schools. From here, the school developed an ally position description and a four-hour intensive training was offered to all staff. Over 50 staff completed this training and everyone chose to become an ally upon completion.

Since the inception of the network, the school has also provided additional training, two years on, for new allies to join. An extended refresher training has also been provided to ensure staff's skills are up to date. The Ally Network also kicked off a more considered approach to events and student agency. The school’s student group is involved in the design and running of LGBTIQ celebratory events at the school and allies are always there to support.

### GOALS

* To build staff capability to support LGBTIQ students
* For students to know they are supported and can seek help if required
* To create an environment where LGBTIQ students feel safe and included
* To empower staff and students to lead LGBTIQ inclusion

## Communication

Awareness of the Ally Network was raised through various platforms. Allies names were published on the school's website and they were given a branded email signature to use on all outgoing emails. A sticker designed by the school with their own branding was provided to display on their laptops or office doors, alongside branded cards to give to students featuring the names and contact details of support agencies.

*“A safe person and a supportive person for any member of our LGBTIQ community to go to –that includes both our staff and our teachers”*

– Assistant Principal

### HIGHLIGHTS

Many of the highlights BSSC have experienced have been on an individual level. The school has had many students identify that they feel safe and included for the first time in their schooling history. Some describe being accepted for who they are and no longer being defined by their sexuality or gender identity. BSSC has had parents thank them for the way in which they manage their processes to ensure that students have a sense of belonging and they are respected individuals. Staff are also grateful for the opportunity to be able to train as allies. This professional learning gives them the opportunity to learn more about what it is like to walk in the shoes of adolescents with diverse sexualities, natural intersex variations and diverse gender identities.

The school was acknowledged for their LGBTIQ inclusion work as they were recipients of the ‘Pride Inclusion Initiative of the Year’ award at the 2019 Victorian Public Sector Pride Awards.

*“I’ve really come into myself and started doing things that make me happy”*

– Student

## KEY SUCCESS ENABLERS

The Ally Network has flourished due to genuine and continued consultation and codesign with the LGBTIQ community and with students. The school has also committed to biannual foundation training for new allies and refresher extended training for previous allies. This means that LGBTIQ inclusion is regularly revisited and reinvigorated. Regular events for LGBTIQ students and their friends are held, and simultaneously celebrated through the school's social media and online channels. This increases visibility and communication with the community. The school also has various visual artefacts displayed around the school. These include a mosaic rainbow flag, rainbow lanyards. Ally Network branded business cards and stickers.

“It’s important school's show they care because it greatly effects peoples learning, mental health and wellbeing, making it so they want to come to school, learn and excel”

– Student

### KEY CHALLENGES

The school was concerned there would be some general community pushback but have to this date had no negative feedback.

There was also some concern that staff would step beyond their role as an ally, so a clear position description was created to ensure staff provide only initial or surface support. Allies use their professional judgment to ensure they refer the student on to wellbeing support services if the student requires.

## MEASURES OF SUCCESS

BSSC has seen a significant increase in enrolments from the LGBTIQ community, especially trans and gender diverse students. Prior to implementing the Ally Network model, BSSC had only ever had one openly trans student at the college. The school now enrols approximately 20 trans and gender diverse students each year. This can be attributed to many factors; the Ally Network model, significant support from Safe Schools and broader trends in the school community over time. These factors combined have made for a safer and more inclusive environment for students to feel more comfortable being who they are.

## OPTIONS FOR SCALABILITY

### AT THIS SCHOOL

BSSC has a group of LGBTIQ students and staff allies who meet twice per term to look at the continuous improvement that can be made at the school. This includes celebrating national events, increasing the culture of inclusion through policies and procedures as well as ensuring that student voice continues to be a key driver of the program.

### AT OTHER SCHOOLS

Although BSSC has a unique position of having a large student population and only working with 16 to 18 year old students, other schools could adopt the model to suit their own context. This might mean adjusting the role description, tailoring the training, using general rainbow stickers instead of designing stand-alone branding and using school specific communication channels to promote the model.

BSSC will continue to mentor other Victorian schools who have implemented similar programs or are planning to do so.

## MAPPING TO FRAMEWORK FOR IMPROVING STUDENT OUTCOMES

### EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

* Inclusive curriculum examples in all subjects
* Implementation of Respectful Relationships
* LGBTIQ inclusion training for all staff
* Student workshops around LGBTIQ inclusion

### A CULTURE OF PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP

* Resourcing LGBTIQ inclusion and support
* 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
* Strategies to increase and support LGBTIQ people on school staff and leadership positions
* Specific reference to LGBTIQ students in school Annual Implementation Plan or Strategic Plan
* Awards and public acknowledgement for work in LGBTIQ inclusion
* Significant days are celebrated and messaged publicly

### POSITIVE CLIMATE FOR LEARNING

* Empowering LGBTIQ students through student voice initiatives including LGBTIQ voice on the Student Representative Council
* Inclusive policies and processes
* All gender bathrooms
* Visual inclusion cues (stickers, lanyards, email signatures, pronoun sharing etc.)
* Staff are trained to respond to bullying
* Uniform policies are gender neutral and explicitly reference trans, gender diverse and non-binary students
* LGBTIQ staff representation
* 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
* LGBTIQ alumni are actively celebrated in the school

“Being a part of the Ally Network is a big way to make us feel safe and included in school”

– Student

“Our Ally model is now embedded in our practice”

– Assistant Principal

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| VIDEO DESCRIPTION The video includes testimonials from students, teachers and education support staff discussing the benefits and impacts of the BSSC LGBTIQ Ally Network. |

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