

Opening Closets -
state-wide training project
improving access to support
services for people with diverse
sexuality and gender identity

Kerstin Stender
Perth Inner City Youth Service



making SAAP services more accessible
for people with diverse sexuality and gender



”Opening Closets”

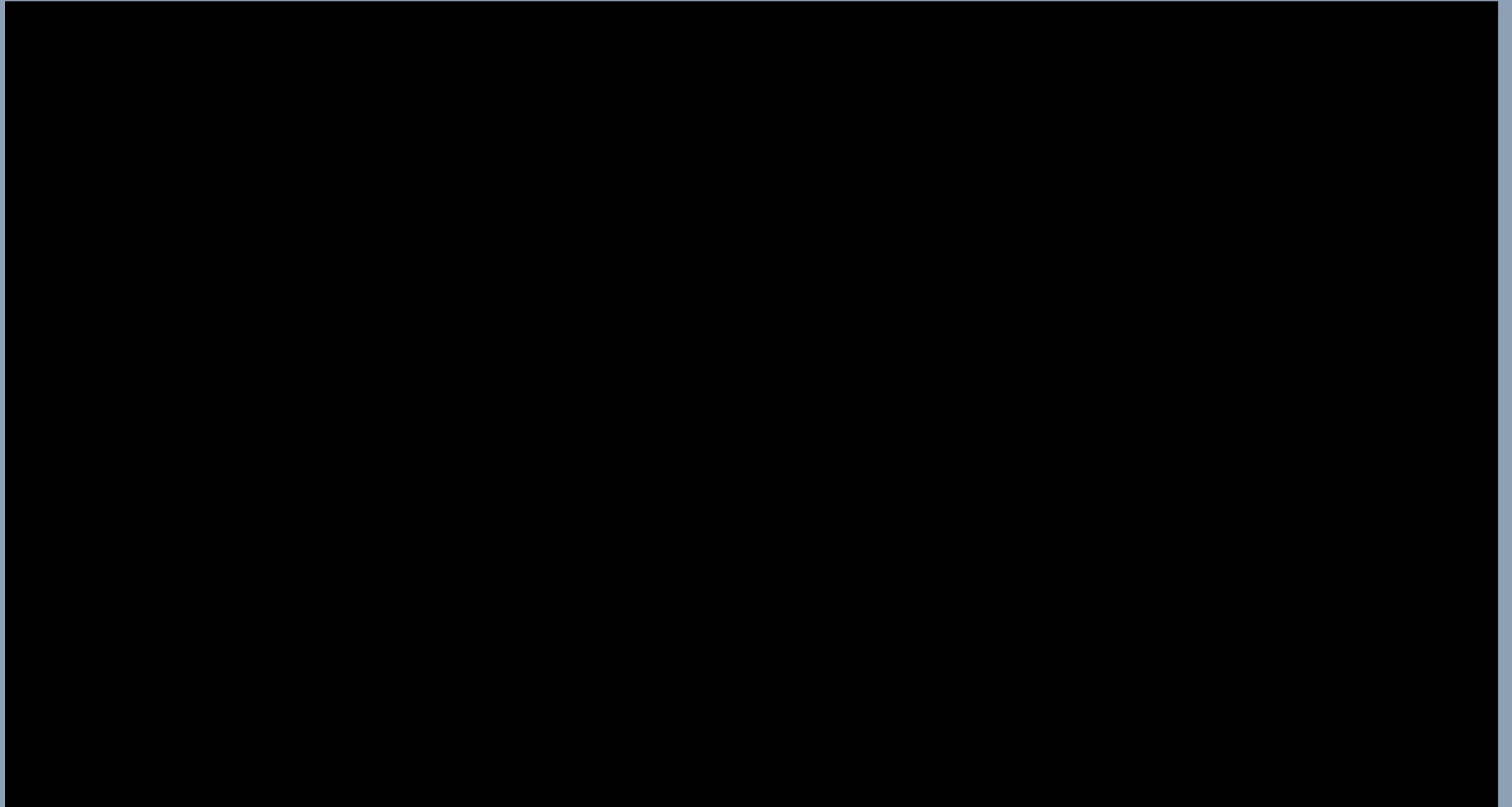
Feedback from the Statewide Training Project on Diverse Sexuality and Gender

Presenters:

Kerstin Stender & Sandra Norman



making SAAP services more accessible
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Our Experiences

- 1. Service**
- 2. Community**
- 3. Worker**

Story from Mt Conservative



- **Discomfort with us as lesbians**
- **Negative attitude towards DSG**
- **Religious based homophobia and transphobia by service**
- **Not supportive of project**
- **Not open to DSG clients**
- **Counteracted by supportive staff**
- **Fear of community backlash**

- **Awareness raising in community**
- **Opportunities created for networking**
- **Collaboration with DSG community**
- **Specialised input into local services**
- **Counteract social isolation**
- **Social networks**

- **Willingness to offer support**
- **Willingness to access outside support**
- **Poor communication skills**
- **English second language**
- **Unable to use the language ‘lesbian’,
or describe it in any other way**



- **Strong religious beliefs stand in contrast to DSG**
- **Not literate**
- **Low skill level**
- **Aboriginal community with low knowledge & isolation**





Other Comments:

“We don’t have people like that in our service or community”

**“Gay people are accepted in this town”
and “You can’t put the posters up here.
That would be too confronting”**

“We treat everyone equal here”



Other Comments:

“We don’t want to encourage those kinds of clients”

“Other clients will feel uncomfortable with people like that in our service”

“We are an accommodation provider and don’t talk about those things”



Other Comments:

“I don’t mind gay men, but I’m not comfortable with lesbians” (Said to us 2 lesbians)

“I already know this stuff and don’t need training”

“I’m gay friendly. I like watching two women together”

Other Comments:

“Laughter” followed by “don’t be offended if he doesn’t want to talk to you” (on request to speak to the service manager about the project)

“I believe you can be cured through prayer”

“Does playing softball turn you into a lesbian?”





Other Observations:

Participant who was extremely friendly and supportive during training did not acknowledge us in the street later that day

Other Observations:

The further north we went the greater the difficulties faced by services in obtaining reliable and trained staff

We became “Agony Aunts” for workers to talk to us about their own sexuality

Comments about our Project:

“We are out of the training loop, so it was great to have them actually come here and spend time. It was good just to talk about these issues and be reminded about what we need to be aware off. It’s also good to know there is someone we can call if we don’t know what to do.”



Comments about our Project:

“To be honest we had not thought of half the stuff they got us to think about. We have started looking at their written material in light of changing some of our policies and procedures. It has been really useful to have something to refer to.”



Comments about our Project:

“Our service found the information on transgender issues particularly helpful as this is not an area we have done much talking and thinking around.”

Comments about our Project:

“I appreciated the training which was needed much sooner than expected! It definitely gave me the confidence to talk to the young gay client who came in the week following our training. And it was good to have a room allocation procedure worked out in advance. I’m sure the posters didn’t escape his notice either. So, good results, thanks for helping to improve our service.”





What we've learned:

- 1. Be very flexible in the way we present the training to accommodate differences**
- 2. Not make assumption about the level of knowledge**
- 3. Accept services are very under resourced and manage participants coming and going from training to attend to other business**
- 4. Acknowledge that around a third of booked participants will not show on the day, sometimes more or less**



- 5. Acknowledge that participants will have beliefs which are not supportive of DSG and encourage them to separate their personal beliefs from their work role**
- 6. Be willing to try multiple approaches to find one that works. Be sneaky!**
- 7. A certain level of familiarity is required to be prejudiced against a particular group. For this reason we encountered mostly homophobia, but very little transphobia. In very remote areas there were few specific homophobic beliefs, due to low knowledge, but rather a general aversion**



- 8. We gained a true understanding of isolation when we found out that people had to buy shoes over the internet (Port Hedland). And the nearest sex shop is 2000km away. This also shows the difficulty in accessing services and support, and even more so for people who don't have access to the internet or phone and outside major towns**
- 9. Huge variation of DSG acceptance within the Aboriginal communities**
- 10. Projector does not operate in 40C heat**



If you have further questions or would like to speak to us about the issues raised in this workshop, please contact the facilitators on:

**Kerstin: picys@westnet.com.au
0412 098 252**

**Sandra: sandra@glcs.org.au
08 9420 7202**

**or phone the Gay and Lesbian Community Services
telephone counselling line:**

**9420 7201
1800 184 527 (country)**