

# Balance or burnout; sustainability for workers in the LGBTIQ+ youth sector

Working in roles that support LGBTIQ+ young people can be dynamic and rewarding. Sometimes it can also be personally and politically challenging, and present unique risks. There is a range of factors which may impact on some workers at some point in their career, both within the workplace and outside of it. These include harmful social norms on a societal level, unsustainable workplace culture and conditions and personal experiences of vicarious trauma and burnout.

The work you do is important. At times some of you will find yourselves facing challenges that compromise your ability to continue to contribute in a sustainable way. This resource provides some tips to help you maintain a balanced and healthy relationship to your work.

Personal and professional sustainability requires a holistic approach to the contributing factors that may cause fatigue, stress and disillusionment and requires systems that mitigate the risks that workers face. Sometimes workplaces will present inflexible hurdles, you might be working within a system in which you lack the power to make structural changes, but there are still ways in which you can create or engage with support networks and make changes to your daily practice. If fatigue and disillusionment have already crept in, take the time to seek help and look after yourself.



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Here are some strategies that can be applied at all levels which we hope can be both preventative and therapeutic, for managing stress, preventing burn-out and creating personal and professional sustainability.

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## Politics & society:

Some people find it hard to watch the injustices faced by the LGBTIQ+ community on a global scale, and at a national level, unacceptable levels of discrimination, harassment and abuse are experienced by LGBTIQ+ young people ([Writing Themselves In 4 report<sup>1</sup>](#)). The current political climate is one in which at times we see dangerous homophobic, biphobic and transphobic attitudes as well as discrimination against people with intersex variations at play. But there have also been some significant wins for the LGBTIQ+ community and it is worth keeping that in mind if you start to feel overwhelmed by how far we still have to go.



- In 2017 same-sex marriage became legal in Australia.
- In 2019 the Victorian Births, Deaths and Marriages Act 1996 was amended to enable trans and gender diverse people to amend their birth certificate to reflect their gender identity without having to undergo medical or surgical intervention.
- In 2020 the Victorian Government passed the Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill.
- And in the Writing Themselves In 4 report<sup>1</sup>, released in 2021, 88.3% of young people reported that their friends were supportive of their sexuality or gender identity.

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Choosing to engage with political advocacy or activism in your work or personal time can take many forms. It may be a commitment to being a better ally in every situation you can, it may involve writing submissions to government, it may involve organising direct actions or protests or it may be something else.

For some, engaging in advocacy and activism is empowering and energising, for others it can be tiring, especially if you do this kind of work as your day job. It is important that your level of involvement is one that is manageable to you personally and that you share the load with community. Long term consistency and collective work is more likely to have a positive affect than a short, fiery burst followed by burnout.

- Read the good news stories as well as the bad.

- Choose a level of engagement that is sustainable for you personally.

- Join community action groups to support each other and share the load.

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## Workplace & community:

The sector is growing and receiving more support, but it is still underfunded in many areas and the need is great. Some people who work in remote areas, or in under resourced environments, as a private practitioner or as the sole person within an organisation responding to the issues faced by the LGBTIQA+ community, may feel isolated and carry a heavy workload. This can also be the case for those in larger teams within organisations if the systems or culture are not supportive.

If this is the case, managing your workload by sharing tasks, creating or joining peer support or working groups and accessing supervision where available can all contribute to creating a work environment nourished by collective care.

**“Collective care invites us to shoulder each other up, work in solidarity, see our sustainability as a collective project and acknowledge that we are not going to stay with sustainability and be useful across the long haul individually.” (Vikki Reynolds<sup>2</sup>)**

- Re-evaluate the scope of your role. You may need to consider: who else can I share this work with? Who can I partner with? Can I talk to management about a more reasonable caseload? Can I say no to taking on that extra project? Is there someone else who can do it?
- Create firm boundaries around work hours.
- Form a working group. Working groups share resources and ideas and work together towards a common goal. You may want to join or start an action or working group within your region or organisation.
- Join a professional network. There are details of some networks at the end of this resource.
- Professional and peer supervision. Engage in ongoing professional supervision, within your organisation, externally, or both. Professional supervision is something quite different from line management. Having the safe and confidential space it will provide to unpack your work, can be a powerful tool in critically reflective practice and self-care. Make time and advocate for peer supervision within your organisation in order to share tools and knowledge and support each other.



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## Self-care & personal wellbeing:

The term 'self-care' (or #selfcare) is used very widely at the moment, often simply as a marketing tool to sell products and services associated with acts of individual self-care such as spa retreats and manicures or by Instagram influencers.

But the idea has a radical history. It was made famous by African-American queer theorist and activist Audre Lorde, when she wrote:

**“Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.” (Audre Lorde<sup>3</sup>)**

Self-care is an essential part of a sustainable social justice movement. If you work supporting LGBTIQA+ young people, at times you may feel your only job is to care for others, but your personal wellbeing is inextricably linked to your ability to provide care.



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The best ways to practice self-care will be different for everyone.  
Here are a few suggestions you may like to consider:

- On a daily basis check in with how you are feeling and acknowledge any anxious or stressful thoughts. Make space in your day for mindfulness practices. These may include meditation, gentle breathing exercises or walks in nature. Try practicing a mindfulness exercise that works for you a few times a day. Even 5-10 minutes regularly can make a big difference to your mental landscape.
- Make boundaries that separate work life from personal life. Rituals such as changing from work clothes to home clothes or walking or cycling part or all of the way home can help to create the distinction. Or if you are working from home, go outside for a walk to mark the conclusion of your work day.
- Look after your physical health and be aware of the impact of drug or alcohol use as a way to switch off.
- Understand the phenomenon of burnout and recognise the signs so you can see it coming and take the appropriate actions to prevent or manage it. Signs of burnout can include feeling tired most of the time, feeling 'jaded' about the work or industry (also known as 'compassion fatigue'), feeling hopeless or helpless about your clients, or making snappy remarks at work or with loved ones. Help colleagues recognise the signs of burnout too.
- Ask for help. If you recognise any signs of burnout, reach out to friends and peers, or get professional support.

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## Networks

These are some of the Networks which have already been established that you may be interested in joining:

- **Rainbow Network Community of Practice Group** - Rainbow Network offers a free community of practice group. This free facilitated group offers support and networking for those working with LGBTIQ+ young people in Victoria. Sessions present an opportunity for workers to debrief and reflect, both professionally and personally with peers. Participants can share their successes, challenges, and how to best support the needs of the young people who access their services. Rainbow Network also hosts professional development and training events and sends out a regular newsletter sharing details of events, resources and opportunities.  
Contact: [rainbownetwork@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:rainbownetwork@latrobe.edu.au)  
[Rainbow Network website](#)
- **MHPN** – The core purpose of MHPN is to improve interdisciplinary and collaborative care practices between mental health professionals in Australia. They work with member and partner organisations, professional associations, and other like-minded organisations, within the mental health sector. They support practitioners to work together better and to improve referral pathways and consumer outcomes.  
Contact: [networks@mhpn.org.au](mailto:networks@mhpn.org.au)  
[MHPN website](#)
- **Network MindOUT** – Network MindOUT supports the professional development of the mental health and suicide prevention sectors, to practice and implement strategies that support inclusive and accessible services to LGBTIQ+ people and communities. The network supports members to stay informed about resources, activities, initiatives, professional development training and research that is pertinent to LGBTIQ+ mental health and suicide prevention through newsletter updates, online webinars, LGBTIQ+ sector updates.  
[Subscribe here](#)

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## References:

1. Hill AO, Lyons A, Jones J, McGowan I, Carman M, Parsons M, Power J, Bourne A (2021) *Writing Themselves In 4: The health and wellbeing of LGBTQA+ young people in Australia*. National report, monograph series number 124. Melbourne: Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University, 43.
2. Reynolds, V. (2019) The Zone of Fabulousness: Resisting vicarious trauma with connection, collective care and justice-doing in ways that centre the people we work alongside. *Context, August 2019*, 36-39.
3. Lorde, A (1988) *A burst of light : and other essays*, Firebrand Books.

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