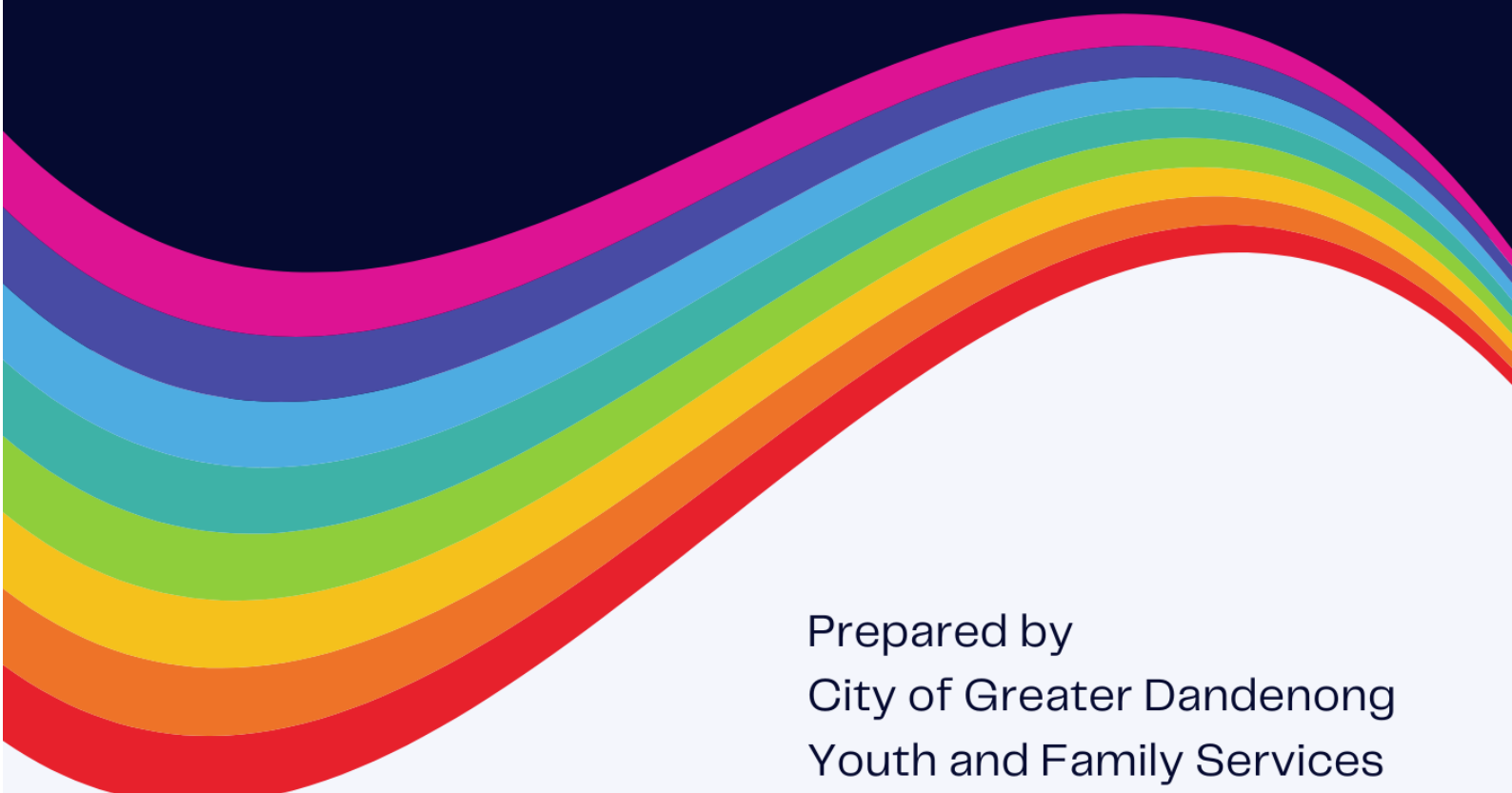


Local Government Youth Service Benchmarking Findings (Part 1)

Supporting Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer (LGBTIQ+) Diversity and Inclusion of Young People, Families, Allies and Community in **Local Government**



Prepared by
City of Greater Dandenong
Youth and Family Services
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CITY OF GREATER DANDENONG YOUTH AND FAMILY SERVICES

LGBTIQ+ Benchmarking Findings Part 1: Local Government

Introduction

The City of Greater Dandenong Youth and Family Services has a long and proud history of providing services and programs to local LGBTIQ+ young people, their families and allies.

Historically, the work of the service has been varied and has included psychosocial support, building mental health literacy, facilitating independent living skills, individual counselling and support; and community education and awareness raising activities. More recent versions of support have included facilitating the Unite Alliance, a regular weekly program to strengthen young people's social connections and sense of belonging; and supporting mental health literacy and wellbeing. Unite Alliance has also sought to build young people's capacity to develop initiatives that aim to reduce discrimination and inequality. The City of Greater Dandenong have also developed and delivered the school-based Inclusive Youth Ambassadors program to secondary school students. The program has been designed to promote awareness and understanding of LGBTIQ+ topics and create a safe and inclusive environment for LGBTIQ+ young people within their respective school environments.

Background Context

Everyone, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, deserves equal access to opportunities and services and their safety should be protected. However, young people who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, and others who use alternative identity terms (LGBTIQ+) are among the most marginalised members of society. There is a disproportionate number of LGBTIQ+ identifying young people experiencing poorer mental health outcomes compared to their peers, which has been attributed to the stigma, discrimination and abuse experienced based on real or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity. This can have lasting consequences on social and mental health and can lead to an increased likelihood of school disengagement and low self-esteem and academic performance.

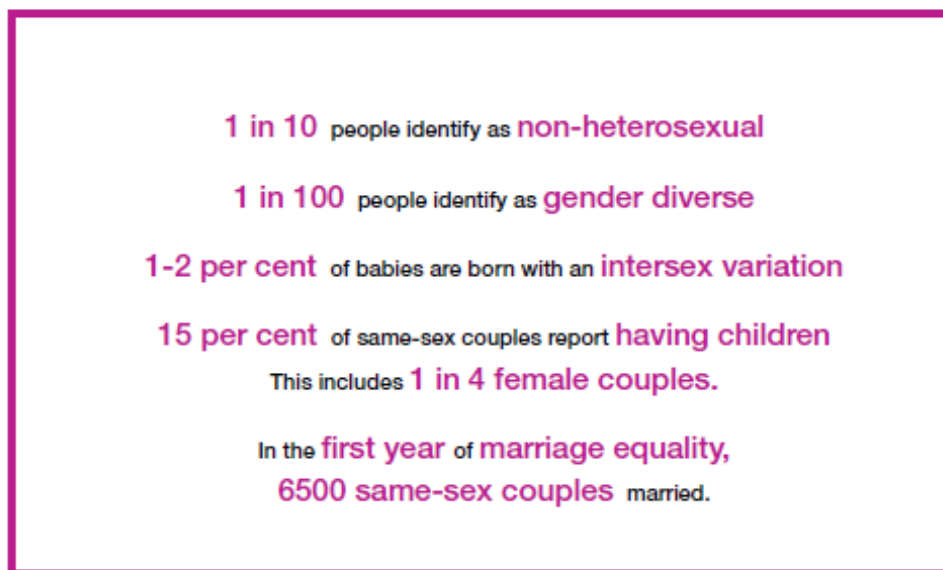
A 2021 statistical snapshot published by LGBTIQ+ Health Australia highlights the disparity in mental health outcomes for LGBTIQ+ communities and the general population. The report outlined that LGBTIQ+ young people are two and a half times more likely to have been diagnosed or treated for a mental health condition compared to their peersⁱ. The report utilised findings from the recent national Writing Themselves In 4 report indicating that almost two thirds (64 per cent) of respondents reported being diagnosed with one or more mental illnesses in their lifetime. Alarmingly, over half (58 per cent) of respondents indicated they had seriously considered attempting suicide and one in ten had attempted suicide in the past twelve monthsⁱⁱ.

The imperative and value of both holistic, individualised and group program supports to LGBTIQ+ young people cannot be underestimated. Historically, local government youth services have played a significant and vital role in addressing the health and wellbeing needs of LGBTIQ+ young people.

In a report conducted by the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society (ARCSHS), three quarters of respondents who identified with the LGBTIQ+ community rated their LGBTIQ+ friends most highly for emotional support, indicating the importance of social engagement and connections

between young people who identify as LGBTIQ+ⁱⁱⁱ. Further, the World Health Organisation reported that three of the key protective factors against the onset or recurrence of mental illness were strong social networks, supportive relationships and a sense of belonging^{iv}. The Writing Themselves in 4 report concluded that the affirmative role and impact of the LGBTQA+ community connection is significant and recommends that interventions providing LGBTQA+ young people with opportunities for shared learning, peer support and collective advocacy should be maintained and particularly attentive to the inclusion of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and those with disability^v.

The evidence is clear LGBTIQ+ young people require access to targeted services and supports and our work to this end requires ongoing attention, investment, and support. All young people have the right to fully participate in all aspects of community life without fear or discrimination.



Reference: Victoria Local Governance Association, Rainbow Resource for Victorian Governments, 2020

Aim of Benchmarking

Greater Dandenong Youth and Family Services is committed to continuous improvement and progressive, evidence base program design. This benchmarking exercise has been undertaken to identify current practice and service models delivered to LGBTIQ+ young people by our counterparts in other local government youth services.

Greater Dandenong Youth Services sees significant value in proactively looking outside our own experience to learn how other like-minded services are operating and meeting desired outcomes using approaches and resources that may be more efficient and effective.

The aim of this discrete activity is to assist Greater Dandenong Youth Services to benchmark its current service model and level of service provision among comparable local government youth services.

It is intended that the findings from this report will assist us in learning how we can continue to enhance our existing program offerings to the LGBTIQ+ community in the City of Greater Dandenong.

Approach

A survey (refer Appendix 1) was prepared and distributed by email to 15 Victorian local government youth services. The scope of benchmarking questions encompassed:

- Existence of an LGBTIQ+ policy position
- Range of services provided
- Age criteria
- Realm of LGBTIQ+ remit e.g. extended support to families, community
- Community Development activities
- Partnership activity
- Staffing levels specific to LGBTIQ+ work
- Budget, including external funding considerations
- Scope of activity and engagement levels during COVID-19
- Future planning

Reponses

A total of 12 individual council responses to the survey were submitted by the closing date. Benchmarking findings in this report are presented as de-identified. However, for reference, Appendix 2 provides a full list of each of the local governments who participated in this benchmarking exercise.

BENCHMARKING FINDINGS

The following presents a summary of the benchmarking findings gathered from the twelve participating Victorian local government youth services.

Policy Position of LGBTIQ+ Young People

In 2016, the Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA) jointly conducted a survey with the Victorian Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby. Seeking information on the LGBTIQ+ community expectations of local government, more than 230 responses were collected from LGBTIQ+ Victorians (over which half of respondents were under 30 years). Respondents were categoric in their feedback in that they expect local governments to have a role to provide inclusive health and community services; and to be consulted on the issues that affect them^{vi}.

One of the areas of focus of this benchmarking activity was therefore to understand the existence of foundational policy positions, if any, of other Victorian councils. This was to learn how widely adopted are plans across councils that set out clear and measurable strategies to work towards achieving and sustaining equity and inclusiveness of their LGBTIQ+ communities. The existence of such plans suggests fully considered and ongoing investment by local governments in valuing diversity and promoting inclusion of our LGBTIQ+ communities.

Except for 1 of the 12 participating councils, all local government youth services indicated the existence of either explicit reference to actions in their respective Youth Strategy or reference to supporting LGBTIQ+ young people and communities in their council's Access and Inclusion Plan.

Service Deliverables to LGBTIQ+ Young People

The majority (92 per cent) of local government youth services responded that they provide LGBTIQ+ specific programs or services in their respective communities. One local government indicated that given the geographical spread and rurality of townships they have committed to making all their programs identify as safe and inclusive for all including LGBTIQ+ young people. They assert this approach of not providing an LGBTIQ+ specific program has been informed by a concern over the lack of anonymity afforded to young people in smaller township areas if they were to specifically offer and promote a 'LGBTIQ+' identified program.

Information and referral as well as regular group programs featured most frequently (90 per cent) across the types of services and programs provided. Individual support was provided by most, but not by all services (approximately 27 per cent did not identify as providing individualised support). 73 per cent of participating councils highlighted working from a community development framework to mobilise community education and awareness projects with young people for the broader public.

Almost two thirds (64 per cent) of the respondents identified supporting frontline workers and youth professionals through networks and working groups. The same proportion of respondents also had an active role in schools, establishing or supporting LGBTIQ+ alliances or support groups and facilitating professional development for school staff.

Only 1 out of the 12 councils who responded to the survey identified working specifically with building parent capacity and establishing an action group.

LGBTIQ+ Group Programs – Age Criteria

The following table represents segmentation by age for LGBTIQ+ group programming. 4 councils operate their program across the 12-25-year age range, with 2 councils providing discrete programs split across age categories. 3 local councils elect to have their LGBTIQ+ programs commence at a later age, 14 years, 15 years and 18 years respectively. One council indicated that they had previously split the age groups but due to feedback and current attendance, are currently offering one group. Two councils did not provide a response to this question.

TABLE 1: GROUP PROGRAMMING BY AGE

Age group	No. of councils
10 – 25 years	1 council
12 – 25 years	4 councils
14-21 years	1 council
15-24 years	1 council
18-25 years	1 council
<i>Age segmented groups</i>	
12-17 years and 18-25 years	1 council
11-14 years; 14-18 years; 18-25 years; parent group	1 council
Did not respond	2 councils

LGBTIQ+ Group Programs, Structure and Types of Activities Offered

Question 7 of the benchmarking survey was posed to gain an appreciation of where group programs are offered, what types of activities are delivered to LGBTIQ+ young people. A prompt list accompanied the question, offering respondents 7 options to choose from and an option to identify any additional items not listed. Largely identified was the provision of social support to young people. Self-care activities and facilitating access to resources and supports beyond what is offered by the respective local government youth service also featured prominently. Just over 50 per cent of respondents highlighted leadership and community project work as a program feature.

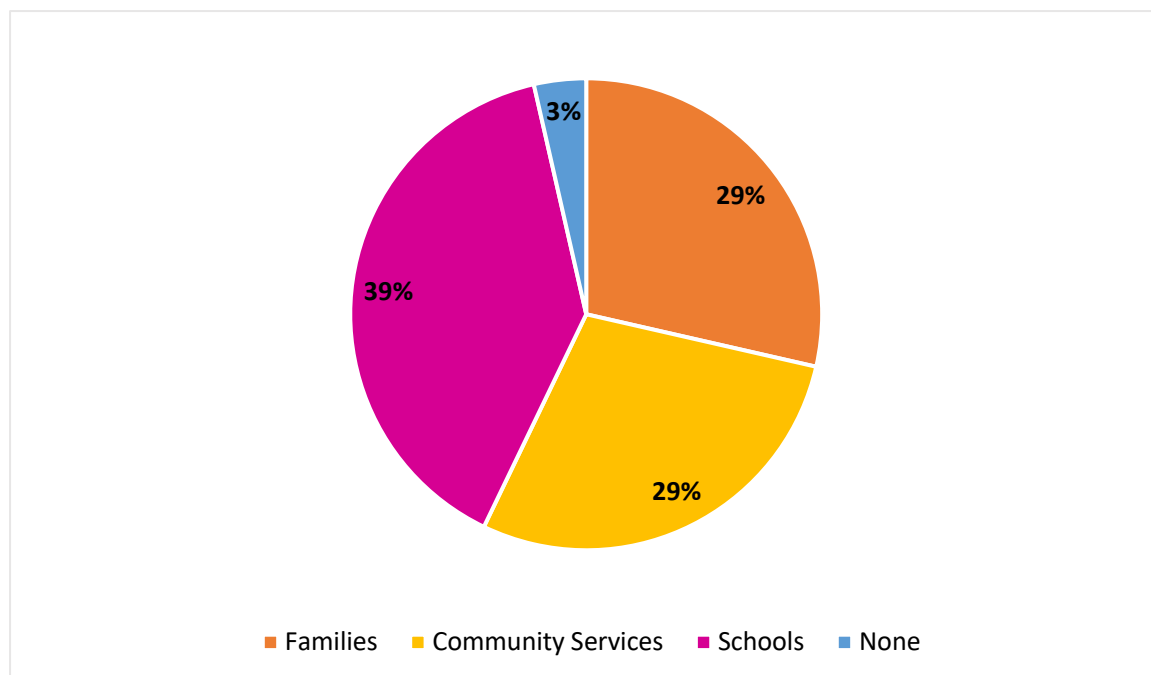
Of interest to Greater Dandenong given the rich cultural diversity of our community was what work, if any, was being undertaken to support LGBTIQ+ young people through a cultural lens. Predictably, culturally nuanced support ranked least with only 18 percent of council's responding in the affirmative. Of those 18 per cent of councils that did indicate they are offering culturally nuanced support; no further details were recorded.

Social inclusion and belonging are critical features of work with young people as we know isolation and loneliness are causal factors of ill-health. Inclusion of lived experience and representation in the development of programs in the LGBTIQ+ space are important features. Designing for the participation of diverse identities, voices and experiences is a foundational step in enhancing social inclusion and feelings of belonging across communities.

Supports for families, community services and schools in building LGBTIQ+ awareness and inclusion

Graph 1 below represents the breakdown of where participating councils are directing their LGBTIQ+ supports and awareness raising efforts in the community.

GRAPH 1: COUNCIL SUPPORTS BY AUDIENCE



The following table presents a summary of the range of activities council youth services are leading to support families, communities and schools in responding to the needs of LGBTIQ+ young people.

TABLE 2: COUNCIL SUPPORTS BY CATEGORY

Community education and awareness raising	82 per cent
Supporting schools to establish LGBTIQ+ alliances/support groups	82 per cent
Targeted professional learning	45 per cent
Other	
Outreach to young person	27 per cent
Partnerships with organisations to deliver training	27 per cent
Social media	27 per cent
Anti-discrimination training	18 per cent

Targeted Professional Learning

Almost half (45 per cent) of responding councils acknowledged delivering targeted professional learning in schools.

LGBTIQ+ Community Recognition Activities

All participating councils in this survey confirmed they celebrate at least one LGBTIQ+ community recognition day/celebration with young people.

92 percent of councils reported participating in ‘Wear It Purple’ and ‘International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Interphobia and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT)’. Recognition and use of the rainbow flag and participation in the PRIDE March followed at 75 per cent and 58 per cent respectively.

To a lesser extent strategic approaches such as the establishment of advisory committees were cited by less than half of council respondents; with Rainbow accreditation only having been pursued by 2 of the 12 councils who participated in the survey.

Community Partnerships

The importance of working in partnership in the LGBTIQ+ space was well recognised and seen as an important feature of advancing the work of local government youth services. Except for only one council response, all councils reported working in partnership, identifying a mix of internal and external services in their responses.

Table 3 lists in alphabetical order the range of partners identified by participating councils.

TABLE 3: COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS
Community Health
Family Access Network
Headspace and Mental Health Services
Internal Council Services – including Children and Family, Library Services, Sport and Recreational Services and facilities
Local Secondary Schools
Minus 18
Other NGO, Youth Services
Q-East Alliance
Queer Space
Rainbow Network
Safe Schools Coalition
Universities

Another area of interest was to ascertain how many local government youth services are jointly delivering LGBTIQ+ programs and services to young people. Just less than half of the participating council's indicated that they have joined forces and work in partnership with a neighbouring LGA to deliver programs and services. This typically referred to training and networking opportunities, including Q-West and Q-East Alliances (comprising local councils in a specific geographical region of metropolitan Melbourne working collectively toward improving the health and wellbeing of LGBTIQ+ young people); as well as joint initiatives arising from regional networking groups.

Networking, collaborative training and collegiate support were also highlighted. It was however cited that geographical distance can serve as a barrier to pursuing collaborative efforts.

Resourcing

Responses unveiled an equal, fifty per cent split with regards to having dedicated staff resources to support council LGBTIQ+ specific services and programs.

Dedicated EFT was responded to by eight out of the twelve participating councils, with responses varying from 1 to 5 days per week. These roles were commonly incorporated into general programming or an existing full time role. Two councils conveyed that they have a full-time staff member with a LGTIQA+ portfolio.

Aside from allocating staff resourcing, again half of participating councils reported allocating either council dollars or grant dollars towards program materials and activities. No explicit break down was provided on the percentage of council dollars assigned, nor funded dollars, or a breakdown of both.

Online Programming – COVID-19

83 per cent of respondents indicated that their service continued to provide an online version of programming or support to LGBTIQ+ young people during COVID. There were only 2 reported councils that did not offer any online alternatives.

A total of 10 councils responded to the success in consistently engaging young people through their online offering. Of these 10, 3 councils noted that they experienced levels of attrition and didn't maintain young people's participation. Where attrition was cited, there were a variety of reasons provided. Examples included a lack of safety for young people 'not out' to family or households. Frequently cited was digital fatigue amongst young people, especially those engaged with online learning for educational purposes.

CONCLUSION

This benchmarking report provides a summary of responses received from 12 participating local government youth services, who are largely representative of metropolitan Melbourne Councils.

The report presents a snapshot in time [March-April 2021] with the information shared, collectively revealing a strong commitment and investment by local government in providing programs and services to LGBTIQ+ young people, their families and allies.

There was marked existence of a policy position where all but one of the 12 participating councils, strongly evidence a commitment to providing LGBTIQ+ specific programs or services in their respective communities. As well as a commitment to participating in community recognition activities, such as IDAHOBIT and Wear it Purple.

Program and service offerings were largely reported to be delivered/targeted within respective local government catchment areas; and where there were collaborative efforts reported across LGA boundaries, although to a lesser extent, this generally related to community development approaches for example mobilising working groups and alliances.

Programming was reported as being principally directed towards psycho-social support, self-care, and linkages to the broader service system. The realm of LGBTIQ+ supports mostly extended to LGBTIQ+ young people, families and community e.g. schools.

Staff and program resourcing were favourably reported with half of respondents indicating that they assign a dedicated worker, between 1 and 5 days per week to support their work in the LGBTIQ+ space. Further, half of respondents also cited that they commit dedicated resources to LGBTIQ+ programming including funding venue hire, activities, community events; and professional development/learning.

APPENDIX 1

LGBTIQ+ Benchmarking Survey

1. Does your council have an Access and Inclusion Plan or a current Youth Strategy that includes specific actions relating to the LGBTIQ+ community, or specifically LGBTIQ+ young people?
2. Does your Youth Service offer specific programs or services to LGBTIQ+ young people?
3. If yes, indicate which ones are applicable?
 - Individual support
 - Information and referral
 - Group work/ weekly term program
 - Counselling/mental health support
 - Community Development (community education and awareness projects)
 - Networks and working groups
 - School based program (alliances or staff PD)
 - Other (pls specify)
4. If you responded no, are you able to briefly outline the reasons why?
5. Where a group program is run, please note any specific age criteria?
6. Where a group program is available, what types of activities are offered? Select all that apply
 - Social support
 - Selfcare activities
 - Culturally nuanced support
 - Leadership
 - Community project work
 - Networking
 - Access to resources and supports beyond the remit of your service
7. Does your youth Service aid or support to families, community services and or schools regarding building awareness or capacity in responding to LGBTIQ+ young people and communities?
 - Families
 - Community Services
 - Schools

8. If yes, please tick any of the relevant activities or provide details in the comments box below.
- Community education and awareness raising
 - Parent forums
 - Supporting schools to establish LGBTIQ+ alliances/support groups
 - Anti-discrimination training
 - Targeted professional learning
 - Other (pls specify)
9. Does your Youth Service support and participate in any of the following LGBTIQ+ community recognition activities with young people? Select all that apply.
- Rainbow accreditation
 - Rainbow flag
 - Wear It Purple
 - IDAHOBIT
 - PRIDE March
 - Advisory Committees
 - Other (pls specify)
10. Does your Youth Service work in partnership with another internal/external services to deliver any of the programs or services previously ticked?
11. If yes, please list who you are working with?
12. Specifically, does your service facilitate any of the previously ticked LGBTIQ+ programs and services in partnership with another local government youth service?
13. If yes, which one?
14. Do you have dedicated staff resourcing to deliver previously ticked LGBTIQ+ specific services and programs?
15. If yes, approximately how much EFT?
16. Do you provide any other resourcing (apart from staff resources) into facilitating LGBTIQ+ specific services and programs?
If yes, please list.
17. Lastly, did you continue to offer online LGBTIQ+ specific services and programs during COVID-19?
If yes, please provide details.
18. Did young people consistently engage through your online offerings?

APPENDIX 2

Participating Councils

The following Victorian Local Government Youth Services completed Greater Dandenong Youth and Family Services' LGBTIQ+ benchmarking survey.

#	Council Name	Department
1	Brimbank City Council	Youth Services
2	Cardinia Shire	Youth Services
3	City of Monash	Youth Services
4	City of Whitehorse	Health and Family Services
5	City of Whittlesea	Family, Children and Young People
6	Kingston City Council	Youth Services
7	Knox City Council	Youth Services
8	Maroondah City Council	Youth and Children's Services
9	Melton City Council	Young Communities
10	Moonee Valley City Council	Health and Young Communities
11	Shire of Yarra Ranges Council	Communities
12	Yarra City Council	Youth Services

END NOTES

ⁱ LGBTIQ+ Health Australia, 2021, 'A snapshot of mental health and suicide prevention statistics for LGBTIQ+ people', April 2021, www.lgbtiqhealth.org.au/statistics

ⁱⁱ Hill A O, Lyons A, Jones J, McGowan I, Carman M, Parsons M, Power J and Bourne A, 2021, 'Writing Themselves In 4: The health and wellbeing of LGBTQA+ young people in Australia', *Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University*, www.latrobe.edu.au/arcshs/publications/writing-themselves-in-publications

ⁱⁱⁱ Leonard, Lyons & Bariola 2015, 'A closer look at Private Lives 2: Addressing the mental health and well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) Australians', Monograph Series no 103, *The Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University Melbourne*

^{iv} World Health Organisation 2005, 'Promoting mental health: concepts, emerging evidence, practice: summary report', *Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse in collaboration with the Victorian Health promotion Foundation (VicHealth) and the University of Melbourne.*

^v Hill A O, Lyons A, Jones J, McGowan I, Carman M, Parsons M, Power J and Bourne A, 2021, 'Writing Themselves In 4: The health and wellbeing of LGBTQA+ young people in Australia', *Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University*, www.latrobe.edu.au/arcshs/publications/writing-themselves-in-publications

^{vi} Victorian Local Governance Association, Rainbow Resource for Victorian Councils, 2020