SHARED VALUES FOR A SHARED FUTURE

HOMOPHOBIC BULLYING AND HUMAN RIGHTS

August 2008 Independent Academic Research Studies

A youth led research and social policy project

L. Parle, R. Sampy, E. Strudwick
Tony Shepherd  Chief Executive Safer London Foundation

“Much has been said about the social problem of homophobic bullying and what needs to be done to address it. However, little effort has been made to find out what young people think about such bullying and what changes they would like to see to address the issue. Sadly, homophobia and bullying happens in many areas of society but the effect it has on young people can ruin their lives. The Equalities Review gave evidence that due to homophobic bullying in schools, young lesbian, gay and bisexual people are more likely to quit their education early. They are therefore at risk of having lower educational skills and as a result the loss to the economy is estimated at £80 billion a year. Policies and practices addressing homophobic bullying within the criminal justice system, education and public services are frequently set up without consulting young people.

This excellent youth-led report is timely and I am very pleased to be invited to introduce it. The findings illustrate the impact youth empowerment can have on young people through human rights education and volunteering as well as how values such as dignity and respect can be introduced into schools to address homophobia and bullying. IARS’ Youth Empowerment Project is an excellent model that brings young Londoners, particularly from disadvantaged groups, together to influence policies that affect their lives, and support decision makers in making changes that are grounded in reality and respond to real need. I encourage anybody working with young people to read this important report and listen to the voices of young people”.

Dr. Theo Gavrielides, CEO, Independent Academic Research Studies.

Over the last decade some steps have been taken towards equality on the statute books for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) people. However, the real life experience of being gay is far from what law and policy intends. Discrimination, inequality and fear of being attacked just because you are different are some of the realities faced by many LGBT people. Data released in June 2008 indicate that
one in five LGBT people have experienced homophobic crime in the last three years and three in four of them did not report it.

The experience and realisation of being gay is particularly difficult for young people. In today’s highly competitive and isolating society understanding and accepting who you are is not easy, and being attacked by your peers for being different makes the experience even more difficult. Due to homophobic bullying in schools, young people who identify as LGB are more likely to quit their education early while some may adopt a harmful behaviour to themselves and others. Research has also shown that 82% of secondary school teachers are aware of verbal homophobic abuse in schools but only 6% of schools have anti-homophobia policies. We know that only a handful of schools have developed mechanisms to tackle this problem and this is mainly because they wont accept that they have it. Rarely you will see a proactive approach to homophobia as there is anxiety by certain groups that if children and young people are taught about gay people they will become gay themselves.

Therefore, a balanced approach to the problem needs to be identified. One that welcomes differences and at the same time respects the rights of others. The framework of human rights, although significantly misunderstood by the media and the public, can provide the language to negotiate the solutions that are needed to tackle homophobia in schools.

Founded upon the four FRED principles of Fairness, Respect, Equality and Dignity, IARS empowers young people through education and skills development to find their own solutions to the injustices they face. We are very pleased to release this timely and much needed evidence-based report. What makes it different is that it was researched and written entirely by young people who have either experienced homophobic bullying themselves or simply wanted to do something about it. Through a robust research methodology they provide credible data that paint a clear picture of homophobic bullying and what needs to be done from the bottom up. IARS will use the findings to empower more young people to be active citizens by demanding their rights and protecting the rights of those who can’t speak for themselves. We hope that others will join us in materialising this difficult task.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Lewis Parle, Head of Youth Programmes and Research at IARS

I think that we all share a basic human desire to be treated fairly, equally, with dignity and respect and to treat others the same; those principles which form the foundation of countless bills of rights and human rights conventions. Unfortunately, amidst pressures and strains, politics and economics, media influences and our backgrounds, that desire can become distorted and we can so easily treat our fellow man with disdain and disrespect. This youth-led volunteer project sought to promote those basic values to other young people and pilot their use in youth-led policy creation to help make a positive impact on the sensitive issue of homophobic bullying.

The homophobic bullying and human rights project was created, led and carried out by a diverse group of 60 young people. The aim of the project was to research the problem of homophobic bullying and use human rights principles as a tool for making recommendations to policy makers on the best way to tackle homophobic bullying and achieve cohesion between all young people.

THE MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE YOUTH Led PROJECT TEAM ARE:

| LGB young people are one group who don’t receive the same levels of fairness, respect, equality and dignity as other young people. Policy makers should recognise this inequality of treatment in policy formation. | 70% of the project’s young people felt that LGB young people are treated with less fairness, equality, dignity and respect (FRED), particularly from their peers, teachers, the media and society in general. |
| Homophobic bullying can affect any young person, straight or LGB. Any solution must therefore not narrowly target one group of people, but involve the wider school community. | A third of the project’s young people who identified as straight said that there was a negative attitude towards sexuality in their schools. Half of those said that this impacted on their personal development. |
| Homophobic bullying can damage community cohesion by excluding and ostracising some young people, particularly those who identify as LGB. | Research carried out by young people at IARS has shown that direct and indirect discrimination against individuals and groups damages the relationship between these individuals and groups and wider society. |
| Human rights language can be used as a middle ground for discussing difficult and |
| The rights language is neutral and moves the focus away from issues such as sexuality to treating each |
### Sensitive topics such as homophobic bullying.

- The link needs to be made for young people between the values of fairness, respect, equality and dignity and human rights.

- The majority of the project’s young people had a limited knowledge of human rights law for example, but when asked to think of values that should determine how people should be treated, nearly 70% of the responses were human rights values (in particular equality and respect).

- Human rights education needs to be a more developed stand alone subject in schools, taught in a practical, rather than academic way.

- Human rights in the everyday world are a practice – learning to treat each other with FRED is not something that can be learned solely from a textbook.

- Human rights can be used as a neutral framework for resolving disputes and dilemmas when there are many different and conflicting views involved.

- Both the research and the human rights training the project team received displayed how clashing viewpoints can be put in perspective through using the neutral human rights framework.

- Young people are able to make sound decisions using the human rights framework. They should be empowered through human rights to deal with bullying in schools.

- The project’s young people were challenged to balance two competing groups’ rights and make a decision on where that balance should be struck. Approximately 90% of the young people felt that it was more important to protect the FRED of young (LGB) people, than the views of those who would be against introducing extra measures to protect those young people.

- To abide by the FRED/human rights framework should be mandatory in schools.

- The project’s young people felt that promoting the FRED values in schools would help prevent homophobic bullying and promote better relations between differing groups of young people generally.

- Schools need to involve community groups in school life so there is an awareness of issues affecting minority groups, such as LGB young people.

- Schools are part of the community and should not operate in isolation. Actively involving the community could promote awareness of and promote better relations between different groups of young people.
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I</th>
<th>p.7</th>
<th>INTRODUCTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>p7</td>
<td>PROJECT AIMS AND OBJECTIVES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p7</td>
<td>PROJECT STRUCTURE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p8</td>
<td>THE VOLUNTEER PROJECT TEAM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p9</td>
<td>THE ROLE OF INDEPENDENT ACADEMIC RESEARCH STUDIES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>II</th>
<th>p.10</th>
<th>HOMOPHOBIC BULLYING IN SCHOOLS: FINDINGS FROM THE PHASE I REPORT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>p10</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION TO THE PHASE I REPORT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p10</td>
<td>MAIN CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>III</th>
<th>p.11</th>
<th>THE HUMAN RIGHTS APPROACH TO HOMOPHOBIC BULLYING: FINDINGS FROM THE FIELDWORK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>p11</td>
<td>METHODOLOGY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p12</td>
<td>FINDINGS: DATA DISPLAY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p19</td>
<td>FINDINGS: DATA ANALYSIS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IV</th>
<th>p.25</th>
<th>CONCLUSION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>V</th>
<th>p.26</th>
<th>BIBLIOGRAPHY</th>
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</thead>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

PROJECT AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The homophobic bullying and human rights project was conceived, carried out and managed by young people (16-25 yrs old). The main aim of the project was to empower a group of young volunteers to influence policy and practice around the issue of homophobic bullying in schools using human rights values. Through youth led evidence based research and policy recommendations the project allowed the youth voice to be heard at the policy table.

Promoting fundamental human rights values (Fairness, Respect, Equality and Dignity\(^1\)) and the inclusion of young people from a diverse range of backgrounds\(^2\) were two principles crucial to the unique methodology of the project. Our initial belief, which was evidenced by the research, was that homophobic bullying is an issue that affects most young people directly or indirectly, and measures that tackle the issue should not focus narrowly on one particular group but incorporate the wider ‘community’. Consequently it was also important for the project to engage with the wider national debate on community cohesion\(^3\), which for the most part has been fairly exclusive of young people and those who identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual (LGB). Homophobic bullying has a larger impact on LGB people than ‘straight’ people – at any age – and promoting understanding and good relations between these young people, and other young people and wider society, was one of the main goals of the project.

Further project aims and objectives included:
- The promotion of human rights values amongst young people
- Promoting active citizenship amongst young people
- Facilitating young people to engage with decision making processes
- Provide public legal education focusing on the Human Rights Act 1998
- Encouraging young people to become positive role models to other young people

PROJECT STRUCTURE AND METHODOLOGY

The project was carried out over a one year period by a core group of young volunteers from a diverse range of backgrounds. The project took the form of 5 phases: desk research, training, fieldwork, final report and championing. See diagram below.

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\(^1\) These values have been identified as underpinning human rights, see F. Klug, *Values for a Godless age: The story of the United Kingdom’s New Bill of Rights* (London, 2000).

\(^2\) Efforts were made to include disadvantaged and marginalized young people, for example those from BAME and LGB communities.

\(^3\) The Commission on Integration and Cohesion recommended looking broader ethnicity when thinking about cohesion. Furthermore the Equality and Human Rights Commission have a duty to promote good relations between all groups of people (focusing on the six ‘equality strands’ of age, disability, gender, race, faith/belief, sexual orientation).
### PHASE I: DESK RESEARCH
The young volunteers (we) carried out desk research on the legislative and policy framework dealing with homophobic bullying. We also identified examples of good practice where human rights have been used effectively in the school setting to promote good relations.

### PHASE II: TRAINING
We were given human rights and Ethical Fitness training to enable us to carry out the fieldwork and have greater awareness about human rights issues.

### PHASE III: FIELDWORK
Using the findings from Phase I and our training, we devised a set of research questions to ask other young people about: their awareness of human rights and homophobic bullying, and balancing individuals’ rights.

### PHASE IV: FINAL REPORT
This report, which has been written by young volunteers, pulls together the entire project’s research and makes recommendations to policy makers on how to use human rights as a tool for tackling homophobic bullying.

### PHASE V: CHAMPIONING
We and other young people will use this report and its findings to push the human rights agenda forward and promote awareness of homophobic bullying with the aim of influencing policy and practice.

#### Ongoing

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**THE VOLUNTEER PROJECT TEAM**

The project was carried out by a team of 6 young core volunteers. IARS deems volunteering to be any activity which a person carries out for the good of others without promise of reward. The opportunity to take part in the project was open to anyone. 2 of the volunteers identified themselves as LGB and the remaining 4 identified themselves as ‘straight’.

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4 The phase I report can be found at [www.iars.org.uk/yep.htm](http://www.iars.org.uk/yep.htm)

5 The human rights training was delivered by Independent Academic Research Studies. The course focuses on the Human Rights Act 1998, the relevance of human rights values to young people and how human rights can be used where there is a conflict of values. The ethical fitness training was delivered by the Institute for Global Ethics and trains people how to resolve tough and complex ethical dilemmas.
Rochelle Sampy
20, Guildford

"I am 20 years of age and am currently doing a degree of Law with International Studies at the University of Surrey. I was born in Bombay, India and came to live in England about 9 years ago. So in a way, I was always going to be different from the other young people, not in terms of language, but in culture and values. I think volunteering is important as it can give you the opportunity to gain transferable skills that one could use in the workplace when one does decide to apply for a job. Volunteering can also give you a greater sense of satisfaction than a job, and demonstrates your commitment to a cause.

I decided to volunteer for this LGBT project even though I am straight since I feel that everyone deserves to be treated equally. An issue of sexual orientation does not mean that a person should have less or more human rights. In addition, I was encouraged to get involved since it was a young people’s project to demonstrate to the rest of society that we can and will make a good difference to the way we live. Human rights are required to be implemented for all individuals and that is how it should be"

THE ROLE OF INDEPENDENT ACADEMIC RESEARCH STUDIES

Independent Academic Research Studies (IARS) facilitated this project and its staff provided the support, guidance and training to empower and enable us to complete it. It is a youth-led think-tank that was set up in 2001 to empower and give voice to young people to influence policy and practices that affect them and through their work to support their peers and youth organisations and groups in achieving community cohesion, fighting crime and promoting equality, human rights and restorative justice.

IARS’ objects state that the charity “is set up to promote the development of young people as individuals and members of society by: providing training guidance and support to enable those young people to undertake research, study or other activities to investigate the issues which affect them and; encouraging young people to use the useful results of that research and learning to increase awareness and understanding of the issues which affect them amongst child and young people welfare professionals, service providers and the public" (IARS Memorandum of Association).

FUNDING

The project was funded by the BigLottery BigBoost scheme and supported by the Consortium of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender VCOs and the Scarman Trust.
INTRODUCTION TO THE PHASE I REPORT

The Phase I report, researched and written by young volunteers, investigated how homophobic bullying is currently dealt with in schools. We looked at legislation, policy documents produced by local and national government, third sector output, selected anti bullying policies, and examples of schools that had used a human rights approach to tackle bullying and discrimination.

The aim of the Phase I report was to provide a foundation for the project team to develop a set of research questions to ask young people. It also provided us with the context within which our policy recommendations would sit. It was important for the project team that we could suggest plausible actions with practical application to help tackle homophobic bullying.

MAIN CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PHASE I REPORT

- Gay, lesbian and bisexual young people are not the only victims of homophobic bullying. A negative and intolerant school environment affects the wider school community.

- Current legislative and policy provisions are insufficient to tackle homophobic bullying in schools because they do not compel schools to effectively promote respect and tolerance of all young people. Instead, much discretion is left to local authorities and individual schools to decide the measures they will implement, which are often solely punitive. This can lead to inequalities in the education system, with some young people benefiting from progressive schools/local authorities, and others being left behind and victimized.

- The voluntary and community sector has an important role to play at the neighbourhood level. Policy and legislation provides the framework within which practice should be placed, but it is what happens at the local level that directly impacts on people’s lives. This report has identified a number of community based practices, which could be used for further analysis.

- Punishing young people for expressing their sometimes intolerant views towards others without an attempt to generate understanding, or repair the harm done between the young people and the school community does little to promote cohesion between young people. The use of restorative justice is one way of addressing this.

- The promotion of universal human rights values to young people as a shared values framework, as one component of a preventative approach to tackle homophobic bullying is more likely to produce the desired result of an integrated, cohesive tolerant school community.

- Young people need to be empowered to tackle bullying. To a large extent, policies to tackle bullying in general in a top down approach, with little or no consultation with young people. Furthermore, when incidents of bullying occur, in many cases it is a teacher that decides on the action to be taken, rather than the young people involved. Youth led policy creation and peer mediation should therefore be encouraged.
Based on the findings from the phase I report, the project team consulted with a sample of 53 other young people to investigate: whether they thought homophobic bullying was a problem in their school, whether a human rights approach is appropriate to tackle homophobic bullying, and when asked to balance the rights of LGB young people and those affected by homophobic bullying against the views and wishes of others, whose rights should be protected and whose should be limited.

**METHODOLOGY**

Based on the findings from the Phase I report, the project team wanted to ask questions to other young people that would challenge them to think about homophobic bullying in a human rights context. The questions therefore focused on young people’s awareness of homophobic bullying, human rights issues, and the limitation and balancing of human rights. Through asking these questions, the project team also wanted to investigate whether it would be practical and feasible for a human rights approach to tackle homophobic bullying might be implemented into schools. There were 20 questions: 15 of which were closed questions and 5 of which allowed for an open response. Given the sensitive nature of the subject matter, the questionnaire was placed on the Internet and answered anonymously. This was to allow the young people who answered the questionnaire to feel free to give their honest views without fear of antipathy or moral judgment against them.

The questionnaire can be divided into three sections.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Respondents' background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Respondents' knowledge and views of human rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Balancing rights exercise</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are certain limitations inherent in using an internet-based questionnaire. The main limitation is that there is little control over selection of the sample. However, to overcome this somewhat, advertising the questionnaire was targeted at youth groups/organisations in the UK. Furthermore, as many of the questions were closed, one of the problems identified was the possibility of leading the sample to a particular conclusion or answer. The young volunteers tried to overcome this by focusing on asking non-leading questions which were as neutral as possible. Finally, given the scope of the project there were insufficient resources to find a large sample and produce a clear and representative picture of young people in the UK. The findings therefore give a flavour of young people’s attitudes towards human rights and homophobic bullying.
The following data display section reveals the answers to each question and gives the overall picture of how the questionnaire was answered. The section on data analysis uses bivariate and multivariate analysis to ask various questions of the data and place the results in the context of the phase I report.

FINDINGS: DATA DISPLAY

This section of the report provides an overview of how each of the questions in the questionnaire were answered. There were 53 respondents who answered the questions, however for some of the questions, each person had space to give more than one response. For example question 8 asking about human rights values received 77 responses, with some people giving 2 or 3 responses each.

Questions 1 – 6 Background

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Where do you live?</th>
<th>Do you have a faith or belief?</th>
<th>Do you have a disability?</th>
<th>How would you describe your sexual orientation?</th>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afro - Caribbean</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (Includes no response)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below 25</td>
<td>83%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Above 25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Greater London</td>
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<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
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</tr>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Jew</td>
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<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
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<td>Atheist</td>
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<td>68%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gay/lesbian/queer</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bisexual</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There were 53 responses for each of the 6 questions in the first section of the questionnaire. The table above displays all the data from all 6 questions. The majority of the respondents were white British (53%), under 25 yrs old (83%), live in Greater London (75%), subscribed to a particular faith or belief (60%), don’t have a disability (92%) and consider themselves to be ‘straight’ (68%).

**Question 8: How much knowledge do you think you have about human rights?**

![Chart showing responses to Question 8]

There were 53 responses to the question. The majority (76%) of the respondents felt that they had at least some knowledge of human rights.

**Question 9: Can you think of any values that should determine how all people should be treated?**

![Chart showing responses to Question 9]

This was an open question with 77 responses; some respondents gave more than one response to the question. The majority of the responses (68%) focused on the values of
respect, equality and fairness. The ‘other’ category contains invalid and inappropriate responses.

**Question 10: Can you name any laws that protect your human rights?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laws that protect human rights</th>
<th>Responses %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human Rights Act 1998</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Convention on Human Rights</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equality legislation</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other including no response and erroneous responses</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This was an open question with 74 responses. Just under half (42%) of the responses named a valid human rights legal instrument. The majority of the responses (58%) either named a piece of equality legislation (15%), erroneously named laws or did not provide a response.

**Question 11: Do you think that all people deserve to be treated with the same dignity, equality and respect?**

There were 53 responses to this question. The majority (83%) of the respondents thought that all people deserve to be treated with the same dignity, equality and respect.

**Question 12: If not, why not?**

Out of those who responded no to the above question (17%), most thought that criminals deserve to be treated with less dignity, equality and respect.
Question 13: How would you describe the attitude towards sexuality in your school?

There were 53 responses to this question. The majority (46%) of the respondents thought that the attitude towards sexuality in their school was either negative or very negative. Whilst only (17%) thought that there was a positive or very positive attitude towards sexuality in their schools.

Question 14: Do you think this has impacted on your development as an individual?

There were 51 responses to this question. Just over half of the respondents (55%) felt that the attitude in their school (see question 13 above) impacted on their development as an individual.
Question 15: Do you think that this attitude has a greater impact on those young people who are gay/lesbian/bisexual/questioning their sexuality?

![Survey Results]

There were 53 responses to this question. The majority (90%) of the respondents felt that the attitude towards sexuality in their schools (see question 13) has a greater impact on Lesbian/Gay/Bi-sexual young people.

Question 16: In your experience are young people who are gay/lesbian/bisexual or questioning their sexuality treated with the same dignity, respect and equality as other young people?

![Survey Results]

There were 53 responses to this question. The majority (70%) of respondents thought that young gay/lesbian/bi-sexual people are treated with less dignity, respect and equality than other young people.
Question 17: If not, who is affecting their right to dignity, respect and equality?

![Bar chart showing the number of respondents affected by different groups]

This was an open question, which received 54 responses. As can be seen from the table above there were a wide range of responses, the most common (20%) being ‘peers’, followed by ‘teachers’ (15%) and ‘prejudiced people’ (15%). These results mirror the findings from other research into the incidence of homophobic bullying carried out by Stonewall.

Question 18: Have you been treated with less dignity, equality and respect because of your actual or perceived sexuality?

![Bar chart indicating 'Yes' and 'No' responses]

There were 53 responses to this question. About two thirds (62%) of respondents felt that they had not been treated with less dignity, equality and respect because of their actual or perceived sexuality, whilst (38%) felt that they had. It should be noted that 20% of the respondents who identified themselves as straight responded yes to this question.

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Question 19: How do you think people generally would react to extra measures to encourage a more open and tolerant attitude towards issues around sexuality in schools?

There were 53 responses to this question. Just under half (48%) of the respondents felt that people generally would react positively or very positively to extra measures in schools, whilst 38% felt that there would be a negative reaction.

Question 20: If negatively or very negatively, which is more important: respecting the views, beliefs and opinions of those who would react negatively, or protecting the welfare of those young people treated with less dignity, equality and respect?

There were 28 responses to this question. The majority (89%) of respondents felt that it was more important to protect a young persons well being – their right to fairness, respect, equality and dignity than respect other’s views, opinions and beliefs.
FINDINGS: DATA ANALYSIS

This section organises and discusses the findings from the fieldwork thematically. It also draws upon the evidence gathered for Phase I report *Human Rights, Equality, Respect, Active Citizenship: Empowering young people to tackle homophobic bullying*. Incorporated into this section are recommendations for policy makers and legislators based on the findings from the fieldwork.

HOMOPHOBIC BULLYING: NOT A PROBLEM IN ISOLATION

From the desk research it was apparent that it is not possible to provide a profile of a typical ‘bully’ or even a typical homophobic bullying incident. The young respondents from the fieldwork identified that negative treatment came from many different sources including: peers, parents, teachers, media and wider society. Homophobic bullying ranged from name calling and physical abuse right through to systematic discrimination and neglect. Stonewall’s *The School Report* focused on the LGB perspective of homophobic bullying and discovered that: 1 in 3 LGB young people don’t feel safe at school and 7 out of 10 say it affects their school work. Furthermore, a piece of research carried out with 85 LGB people at the Metro Centre in Greenwich in 2002 revealed that half of them were bullied at school, a third had attempted suicide and a third had deliberately harmed themselves. The effects of homophobic bullying are felt most by those young people who identify as Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB). The majority (70%) of the respondents agreed that young LGB people are treated with less FRED and 43% believed this to be linked to a negative attitude in their school towards sexuality. There is therefore a clear link between homosexuality and homophobic bullying. This may appear to be obvious, but less obvious are the effects it has on ‘straight’ young people. About one third (27%) of those respondents who identified themselves as being straight said that there was a negative or very negative attitude towards sexuality in their school. About half of those said that this attitude impacted on their personal development. Furthermore, one fifth (20%) of the respondents who identified as ‘straight’ said that they had been treated with less FRED because of their actual or perceived sexuality. This illustrates that the ‘straight’ respondents were not only sensitive to and aware of the negativity in their schools, but it directly affected and impacted on how they chose to develop themselves. Homophobic bullying therefore has the potential to affect anyone and is not solely an LGB issue and therefore should not be tackled in isolation.

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7 The report can be found at [www.iars.org.uk/yep.htm](http://www.iars.org.uk/yep.htm)


LGB young people are one group who don’t receive the same levels of fairness, respect, equality and dignity as other young people. Policy makers should recognise this inequality of treatment in policy formation.

Homophobic bullying can affect any young person, straight or LGB. Any solution must therefore not narrowly target one group of people, but involve the wider school community.

Human rights language can be used as a middle ground for discussing difficult and sensitive topics such as homophobic bullying.

THE RELEVANCE OF SHARED HUMAN RIGHTS VALUES TO YOUNG PEOPLE AND BULLYING

From the phase I report it was clear that a young person’s background can have a significant impact on their views and relationships with other people. The diagram below illustrates how a proliferation of messages, values and views can be absorbed by a young person. Which channel has the most influence will depend on the person. The report illustrated how this can affect their views of other individuals and groups. It is therefore not surprising that if there is a negative attitude towards sexuality in the home, at school, in the media and in friendship groups, that a young person may share that view too, which as the survey has shown, can impact on a persons development whether they are straight or LGB.

A system of shared values, such as human rights values, can allow a young person to mediate between these often conflicting views to ensure that there is a culture of respect for human rights, and a tolerance of difference. It also provides a neutral and constructive framework for discussing difficult topics such as homophobic bullying. The focus is shifted away from personal identity to one of rights and responsibilities. The complex questions rooting out the cause of the problem are replaced by a constructive dialogue that focuses on achieving fairness, equality, respect and dignity for every person irrespective of their sexuality, gender, race, beliefs or any other personal characteristic. Human rights can therefore be a powerful tool for bridging taboo topics.
The evidence from the research goes some way to support the above proposition. The questionnaire did not focus on identifying social problems leading to homophobic bullying, or apportioning the blame between different parties. Instead it focused on challenging the respondents to use the human rights framework and language. The respondents were from a wide range of backgrounds, with many different faiths and beliefs (see questions 1-6 above). It might have been pre-supposed that this would produce a wide range of responses however, there was no clear distinction. Furthermore, of the respondents who thought they knew little or nothing about human rights (25% of total) 80% named at least one of the FRED values when asked “can you name any values that should determine how all young people should be treated?” Over 90% of those respondents when asked if they thought all people should be treated with the same fairness, equality, respect and dignity, responded ‘yes’. Most respondents therefore thought that these values are important in our society, but they just didn’t associate them with the term human rights.

Furthermore, human rights training was attended by all of the core volunteers for this project. The training was also attended by young people from another project called the Building Bridges Project (BBP). The BBP is a research and social policy project focusing on the causes of gang culture in London with a team of mostly Black and Minority Ethnic volunteers. Using the framework of human rights and the shared language of human rights values (Fairness, Respect, Equality and Dignity), the two groups were able to discuss the two respective topics together. The session showed how human rights can be used in practice to bridge social divides and promote respect for different groups of young people.10

- The link needs to be made for young people between the values of fairness, respect, equality and dignity and human rights.
- Human rights can be used as a neutral framework for resolving disputes and dilemmas when there are many different and conflicting views involved.
- Human rights language can be used as a middle ground for discussing difficult and sensitive topics such as homophobic bullying.

BALANCING RIGHTS: YOUNG PEOPLE AS DECISION MAKERS?

The final two questions in the questionnaire challenged the young respondents’ ability to make a decision based on a conflict of two group’s human rights. The first of these questions asked the respondents to consider how they thought people would generally react to measures to encourage a more open and tolerant attitude towards issues around sexuality in schools. The second asked those respondents who answered ‘negative’ or ‘very negative’ to decide whether protecting a person’s views and beliefs, or young LGB people’s rights was more important in this scenario. The overwhelming majority voted for the latter.

The above result is significant for two reasons. The first is that the question challenged the young respondents to make a decision, which would require a compromise for either LGB young people, or those people who had negative views. On a balance they opted to protect the human rights of those who would be at risk from homophobic bullying. Decision-making processes are fairly exclusive of young people at all levels. The human rights framework is a tool that can empower young people to make fair and responsible decisions because it allows for many differing views to operate in a neutral space. This approach has been piloted successfully in Hampshire with the three Rs initiative: Rights, Respect and Responsibility. It was a whole school approach promoting human rights values in every part of the curriculum and school life. Research evaluating the experiment showed that human rights education has many positive effects: it is an empowering and morale boosting experience; teachers are motivated towards increased professionalism in their interactions with students rather than guided by personal feelings; children are empowered when they learn about their rights and the RRR whole school approach proved to be an effective behaviour management strategy.¹¹

The second reason why the respondents’ choice was significant is because it was based on human rights principles rather than personal views. The respondents were a mix of straight, LGB, Christian, Muslim, other faiths, no faith and different ethnicities. The human rights framework gave the respondents the universal and neutral framework and language of human rights to make their choice. This allowed the young people to put their personal views into the perspective of each person’s entitlements to be treated fairly, equally and with dignity and respect.

- Young people are able to make sound decisions using the human rights framework. They should be empowered through human rights to deal with bullying in schools.

THE NEED FOR MORE AWARENESS ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS AMONGST YOUNG PEOPLE

The majority of the young respondents had a rudimentary idea of what human rights were, but there was a lack of depth in that knowledge. The human rights training that was given to the core volunteers of this project was aimed at broadening this knowledge. In particular it presented human rights as a practice, rather than an academic subject, with practical exercises and dilemmas. It also taught the volunteers about the legal framework for human rights in the UK. This enabled them to design the questionnaire and visualise how human rights can be used as a tool for promoting better relations between different groups of young people in their schools and local communities.

Human rights education aimed at young people in the UK is relatively undeveloped and if implemented more fully could help promote the culture of human rights that the New Labour government promised in 1997. Human rights education is often included within other subjects, such as Citizenship and rarely if at all engages with human rights law¹². It is important for young people to feel empowered through knowing their rights and responsibilities, and using

¹¹ http://www3.hants.gov.uk/education/childrensrighs/
¹² However, a new resource developed by the Ministry of Justice and British Institute of Human Rights uses a practical approach to delivering human rights education, Right Here, Right Now: Teaching Citizenship through Human Rights (DCSF, 2008).
law as an instrument of protection against abuse. However, bringing human rights experts into school is not always a feasible option, but acknowledging the FRED principles as a mandatory school framework is a start; even when this presents tensions.

Any such human rights education needs to engage with local communities. Schools are not isolated entities, but part of local and national communities. Local community groups such as Independent Academic Research Studies who are ‘in touch’ with the issues facing specific groups in the local area can play a part in promoting a culture of respect for rights and responsibilities. For example IARS has provided human rights training to young people since 2006 focusing on issues affecting young people generally, and young people from those community groups whose human rights are often forgotten and violated, for example BAME and LGB groups.

- Young people need to be empowered through human rights education to promote better relations between different groups and resolve tensions.
- Human rights education needs to be a more developed stand alone subject in schools, taught in a practical, rather than academic way.
- To abide by the FRED framework should be mandatory in schools.

YOUNG PEOPLE, HOMOPHOBIC BULLYING, HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE COMMUNITY

Homophobic bullying and human rights both have consequences for achieving community cohesion. The term community cohesion has been used in the political realm since the Cantle report in 2001\(^\text{13}\). The report concluded that many ethnic groups were not integrating and were therefore leading “parallel lives”. The report also made a series of recommendations around fostering “community cohesion” and spurred its adoption as an important policy area within both local and central government. More recently, the Commission on Integration and Cohesion in their final report\(^\text{14}\) argued for a widening of the approach to community cohesion beyond ethnicity.

Homophobic bullying is a community cohesion issue because it affects one group in particular. Young people and young LGB people can face multiple discrimination and as members of the community who can easily be excluded and ostracised, they need to be actively included in the debate on community cohesion. Homophobic bullying and community cohesion are also human rights issues as quite often the social injustice and fractures between community groups often touch on human rights issues\(^\text{15}\). For instance, Spencer claims that while bullying in schools may be motivated by racism, religious intolerance or homophobia, it may be more effectively addressed overall as a human rights issue under “protection from degrading treatment and the value placed on respecting the dignity of each individual, regardless of ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation, weight or any other characteristic which bullies consider warrant prejudicial treatment”\(^\text{16}\).

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This links with the above proposition that schools need to engage with community groups. Not only do local community organisations have expert knowledge on the issues that affect their respective communities, but the links can be made for young people between their life in their school community and the wider community. Empowered with the knowledge of human rights values and the issues affecting people in their local community young people can promote cohesion amongst different groups by encouraging an open dialogue.

- Homophobic bullying can damage community cohesion by excluding and ostracising some young people, particularly those who identify as LGB.
- Schools need to involve community groups in school life so there is an awareness of issues affecting minority groups, such as LGB young people.
- Maximise the opportunity of the LGBT History month and tap into existing resources made available by the Third Sector such as Schools Out, the LGBT Consortium, Stonewall and the Camden LGBT Forum.
The main finding from this youth-led research project is that human rights is a versatile tool in a modern and multicultural society for achieving cohesion and better relations between different groups of people; homophobic bullying is no exception. Young people when empowered through human rights are able to look past their cultural differences and focus on their common humanity, rather than divisive differences.

Homophobic bullying is but one of many expressions of tension between young people. Using the human rights framework enables young people to look at each other as part of a community with the same entitlements to be treated fairly, equally and with dignity and respect (FRED), irrespective of any differences or idiosyncrasies. However, these values cannot just be taught in the classroom like an academic subject. They are a practice, something done on an everyday basis and first, young people need to see how human rights relates to their every day lives. The human rights training that was provided through this project is only one example.

The relevance of human rights to young people and homophobic bullying is provided through appropriate education and skills training. This project used a practical approach that focused on trying to solve problems using human rights, rather than just assimilating the history of conventions and treaties. Through this approach young people are able to appreciate why to be treated with FRED is important for their well-being and that of others – especially those who are often denied their rights.

This presents a list of practical problems. Human rights, community cohesion and youth empowerment are all sensitive issues and require a common sense approach in schools, rather than an over sensitive one. Furthermore, schools have challenges in attaining teachers sufficiently knowledgeable and confident in using human rights education in schools to achieve cohesion and therefore better relations. But this, to some extent can be mitigated by involving the Third Sector particularly youth-led groups, such as IARS, which have experience and expertise in human rights issues that affect particular communities.

Developing a respect for human rights culture needs to happen at the community level also. Community groups and organisations, together with schools and other public authorities need to engage with human rights debates and work together towards achieving a more just society through a neutral human rights framework, thereby setting a strong example. It is what happens on people’s doorsteps, which affects them most.

The Phase 1 report and this publication have provided numerous case studies from the Third Sector and beyond where human rights education was used successfully to promote the FRED principles and through them achieve community cohesion and eliminate homophobia. There is no need to re-invent the wheel. Government and larger organisations can tab into existing resources and utilise the expertise of the Third Sector in working with young people particularly organisations that work with marginalised groups such as LGBT.

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17 For instance, the BORIS project in Northern Ireland, the 3Rs project in Hampshire, the Building Bridges Project in London, Schools Out and the Youth Empowerment Project. For a full list see Phase 1 report. Hard copies can be purchased for £7 through www.iars.org.uk


