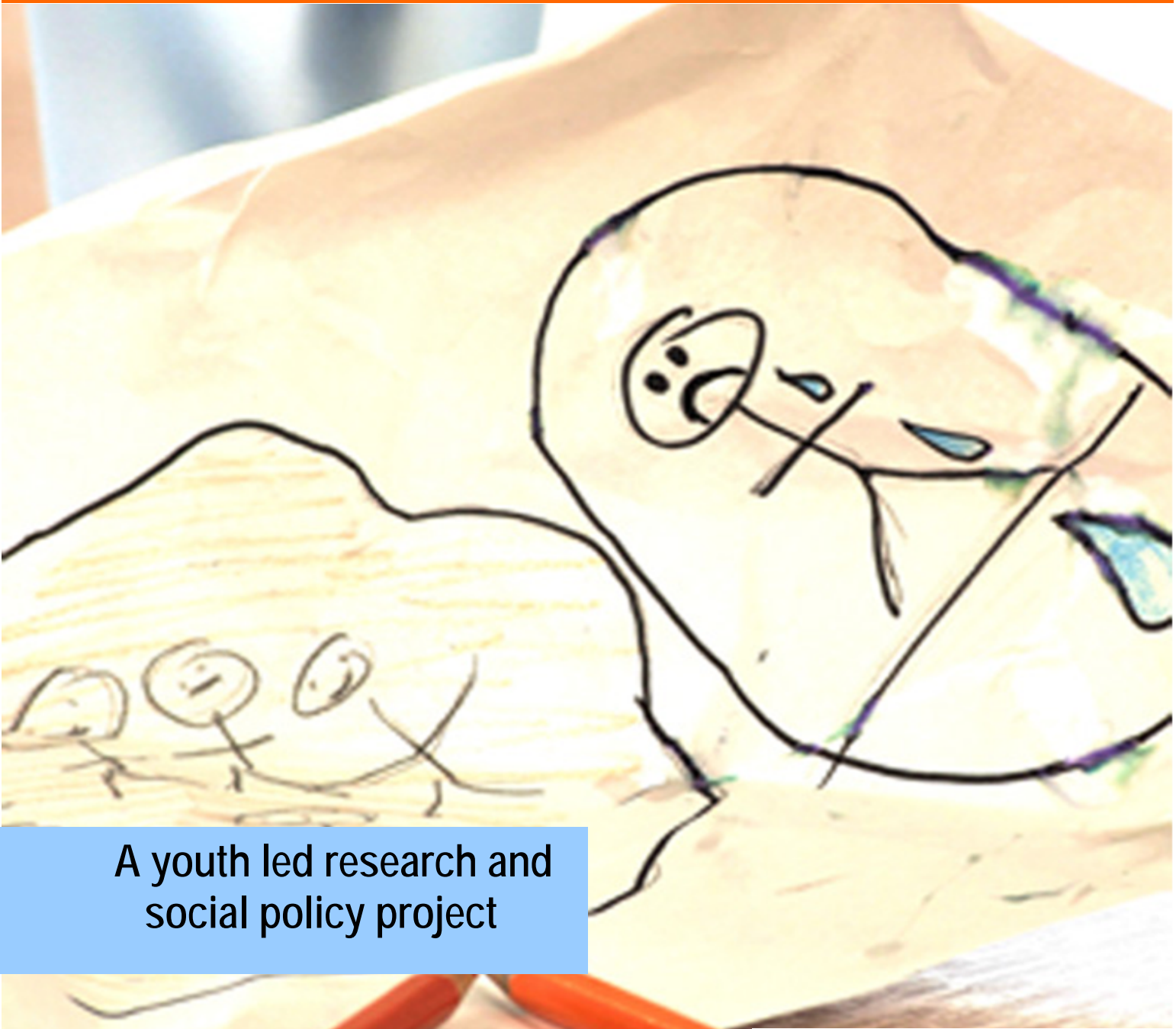


HOMOPHOBIC BULLYING AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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SHARED VALUES FOR A SHARED FUTURE Executive Summary



A youth led research and
social policy project

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FORWARD



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 won't 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.	other with FRED.
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.

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