



AGM HONOURS COMMUNITY ACHIEVEMENTS



Photo by: Caleb Hawk

This year's Annual General Meeting on 19 November offered our community a timely reflection on the past year. With the positive outcome of the national marriage equality survey announced just days earlier, the AGM included the 25th Annual Keith Harbour Address delivered by the Human Rights Law Centre's Anna Brown (pictured left), one of the champions for marriage equality legislation in Australia.

Membership. All recipients receive a life membership award as well as a vintage hat and handbag as per VAC tradition.

2018 Special Service Awards were presented to last year's Keith Harbour Address speaker Associate Professor Edwina Wright as well as Dean Arcuri, Dimitri Christou, and Kelly McGowan. This year's Media Award was presented to reporter James Hancock for his work at the ABC. Anna Brown returned to the stage to accept the President's Award on behalf of the Human Rights Law Centre. Margot Fink was this year's recipient of the Greig Friday Young Leader Award. Margot was one of the first members of our Trans and Gender Diverse Advisory Group and provided key advice in establishing Equinox. She was also the former Head of Gender Diverse Projects for Minus18 and their communications coordinator when they were under attack by media scrutinising the Safe Schools program.

The outcome of board elections were announced with both Deb Sykes and Isaac Huang returning to serve on the board. They'll be joined by Craig Brennan.

Life Membership was awarded to three individuals with a longstanding commitment to supporting our organisational purpose and the communities we serve. This year's recipients included: Emeritus Professor Anne Mitchell AO, Brian Price, and Associate Professor Ruth McNair. Unable to attend last year's proceedings, Auntie Bev Greet was also presented with her Life

We also released our 2016/2017 Annual Report featuring a collection of portraits featuring community members with 'if' statements that reflect on the discrimination and stigma faced by LGBTI people and PLHIV around the globe. You can check out the latest annual report online at: vac.org.au/about/annual-reports. More photos on page 4.

MENINGOCOCCAL CASES RAISE CONCERNS

Over the coming months, you'll be hearing a lot more about meningococcal. An outbreak of meningococcal has been found in gay and bisexual men and has been sexually transmitted. Unfortunately if left untreated, it can lead to nasty outcomes. So it's important to know meningococcal disease a bit better and become informed on how to easily help prevent it.

What is it?

Meningococcal is a bacteria that lives in the back of the nose and throat of about ten per cent of people without causing illness. Meningococcal disease can result when a particular strain gets through the lining of the throat and enters a person's bloodstream.

Meningococcal disease is very uncommon however it can progress very quickly and can lead to death or permanent disability. In some cases up to ten per cent of infected people die even if they are treated with the right antibiotics and on average two in ten people will be left with a disability – but we can prevent this from happening.

How do you get it?

The bacteria can only survive outside the body for a few seconds and can only be passed from person to person by close and prolonged household or intimate contact, for example through intimate kissing or after contact at heavily populated bars, clubs or parties – so unfortunately, it's easy to get.

What are the symptoms or signs?

The symptoms to look out for include limb pain, a sudden high fever, intense headache, vomiting, a stiff neck or sore muscles,

a red/purple rash that won't go away and extreme sensitivity to light. If you have any of the symptoms it is important that you seek medical attention right away as these symptoms can potentially lead to more severe and permanent outcomes rapidly.

Can it be treated?

If meningococcal disease is suspected, an antibiotic (usually penicillin) is given immediately by injection. People with meningococcal disease are almost always admitted to hospital and may require admission to an intensive care unit. The sooner people receive treatment, the less damage the disease can cause. It is important to remember that this is an unpredictable infection that can progress very rapidly, despite the best treatment.

How can it be prevented?

Immunisation against meningococcal bacteria is the best protection against meningococcal disease. A vaccination is available for several strains of meningococcal. It is important to know that even if you have had meningococcal disease, you may not develop lifelong immunity and are still advised to be immunised against further recurrence.

The vaccination is free for gay and bisexual men who may be at risk of contracting the disease.

For more information please check out the better health channel: www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Adam Hynes is VAC's Team Leader of Health Promotion



REVISIONING

Do you find yourself controlling your partner's decisions? Blaming your partner or other factors for making you angry? Hurting your partner, friend or family physically or emotionally? Then you might be using relationship violence.

ReVisioning, our men's behaviour change group may help.

ReVisioning is a group where you as a same-gender attracted man can learn about breaking patterns of violent, abusive or controlling behaviours. The group offers a safe environment where you can explore power and control in your relationships and raise your awareness of the effects your behaviours have on others and yourself.

ReVisioning aims to provide information and support so you are able to challenge yourself to take more responsibility for your behaviours. Together we work to build your confidence and self-control and help you deal with conflict and difficult emotions in your relationships and in other parts of your life without the use of abusive or controlling behaviours.

The next ReVisioning group commences in mid February 2018. If you want to be a part of this group, contact us at 03 9865 6700 or email reversioning@vac.org.au to speak with one of the ReVisioning Team to see if ReVisioning is right for you.



PRONTO! BENDIGO

On World AIDS Day 2017, PRONTO! Bendigo launched — offering free, rapid HIV testing for gay men and other men who have sex with men. Much like our highly successful PRONTO! service in Fitzroy, PRONTO! Bendigo is run by likeminded guys, offering a less confronting testing experience.

Over 5,500 people have used PRONTO! in Melbourne and surveys have indicated almost unanimous satisfaction with the experience, the staff and the environment. Our PRONTO! Bendigo team has been trained alongside the Melbourne team and will work closely with the nurse practitioner at Bendigo Community Health Services.

PRONTO! Bendigo is a partnership between VACountry, Bendigo Community Health Services (BCHS) and the Burnet Institute.

The clinic runs on Thursday afternoons until 7pm every fortnight at BCHS 171 Hargreaves Street in Bendigo. To book into the clinic phone 03 5448 1600 or visit: vac.org.au/prontobendigo



Kath Leane
HIV positive woman

'OUR LIVES' IN SA

The stigma surrounding HIV is still very real and present for the estimated 27 thousand people living with HIV nationally. It comes in many forms and can reach beyond the individual to affect friends and family. In 2017, we have the opportunity to end the stigma associated with HIV, and over in South Australia, the SAMESH team (a joint program of SHINE SA and VAC) hopes that their new *Our Lives* video campaign can help achieve that end.

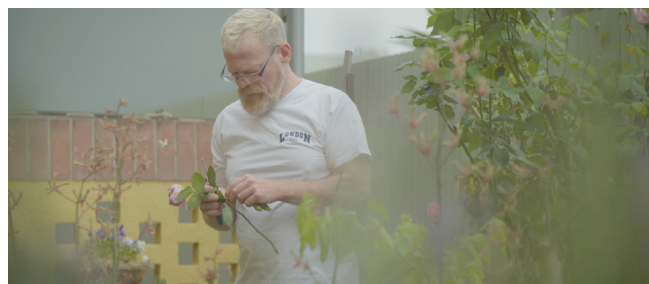
The *Our Lives* campaign (pictured above and below) explores the lives of three HIV positive South Australians and their personal experiences of HIV stigma and discrimination in 2017. Kath, Adrian and Greg along with their friends and families relate their individual narratives of living with HIV, dealing with stigma, and the ways they believe we as a community can overcome the stigma associated with living with HIV.

Our Lives was launched by the honourable Nat Cook on World AIDS Day 2017 in South Australia, the day that commemorates those lives to the global HIV/AIDS epidemic whilst also reflecting on the progress we've made in research, treatment, prevention and advocacy for people living with and affected by HIV. The attendees include community members, elders, politicians and leaders of other health services — all of whom congratulated our three stars for sharing their stories and wished the campaign the utmost success.

With the *Our Lives* campaign, SAMESH seeks to address HIV stigma with a personal narrative and convey a message that HIV can affect anyone. We as a community can help end HIV stigma through education and empathy for one another.

Check out the stories of Kath, Adrian and Greg on the SAMESH website at samesh.org.au/ourlives

Adrian Hadjialexiou is the SAMESH Communications Coordinator



EXPRESS YOURSELF

As one of our new Volunteer Contributors, Mark Nunan attended our October community forum to unpack some of the issues faced by LGBTI people seeking asylum in Australia

“**B**ack at home I cannot express myself or I'm not allowed... But when I come here I am forced to... I don't even know how... I just learned pronouns!”

Tracy offers just one example of the difficulties experienced by LGBTI people while navigating the legally complex, and universally exhausting process of seeking asylum in the Australian system of indefinite offshore detention.

With many fleeing trans and homophobic societies and the constant threat of violence that exists within them, it is increasingly apparent that our system is poorly qualified to cater to the needs of LGBTI people relying on its support.

Speaking as part of panel of experts brought together by VAC, Tracy is joined by a group of human rights advocates including Activist Roj Amedi, Lawyer Lee Carnie and David Mejia-Canales, author of the *Something For Them Report*.

The panel have gathered in Docklands Library (yes, it's a place-look it up) to discuss the extra layer of complications faced by LGBTI individuals within the system.

Whether caught up in the horrors of processing or struggling with integration and settlement, refugees are often forced to jump through what Canales refers to as 'flaming hoops of fire'.

The irony of Australia's recent appointment to the United Nations Human Rights Council is not lost on the gathered crowd.

Nervous laughter ripples through the auditorium as this position juxtaposes the stories told tonight.

On more than one occasion during the 90-minute panel, speakers refer to alarming interrogation techniques employed by immigration officers in Australian and British centres.

In these incidents, those seeking refuge have been forcibly challenged to prove or disprove their sexuality or gender identity through a depressingly western and stereotypical lens.

As highlighted by Tracy, in a lot of cases, these people are coming from environments where true self-expression is tantamount to death, or at the very least, abuse.

It's unsurprising then that they may not be familiar with Madonna's body of work or the names of gay clubs in their home towns.

This is to say nothing of the lack of exposure to western identity politics or queer theory which often leaves asylum seekers lacking the necessary language or tools to explain themselves to the satisfaction of the authorities.

The idea of sexuality or gender identity as the performance of a set of universal (stereotypical) signifiers is problematic enough in our own democratically free society. In the context of a detention centre it's downright deadly. Here, an individual's failure to perform their queerness with sufficient flourish or enthusiasm can well be enough to send them back to the violence and trauma they have fought so hard to escape.

Within the stories of fear, frustration and heartbreak on offer tonight, there are however occasional flashes of hope.

Lee Carnie takes a moment to reflect on the truly remarkable story of Nima and Ashkan; two Iranian men who, while detained in the harsh, often-violent Nauru detention centre happened to not only meet, but to fall in love.

Their love has survived against the odds and has, in some ways become a symbol of perseverance, but their struggle isn't over yet and the pair is still battling for the opportunity to simply be themselves, in peace, together.

As the evening draws to a close, conversation inevitably turns to action. While donations to the various groups are absolutely necessary, it is equally as important to take the conversation beyond the echo chambers of The Left.

Activism requires action.

We are encouraged to step up and to take the conversation to places it may struggle to reach, to ears that may not otherwise have the opportunity to hear.

In times like this it's never been more important to be a voice for those who cannot speak.

For more info, check out the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre and the Human Rights Law Centre:

www.asrc.org.au www.hrlc.org.au



AND THE AWARD GOES TO...

The annual GLOBE Awards on Saturday 28 October recognised some of the amazing work being done in Victoria's LGBTI communities. Rewired, our support program aimed at same-sex attracted men and methamphetamine use was nominated for 'A Healthy Community' award. Meanwhile, the VAC & GLLO Beat Safety Patrol project, tailored to protect beat users within the community from homophobic attacks and violence was a

finalist for the 'Protecting Our Community' Award.

The highlight for VAC on the night was the 'Volunteer of the Year' award going to our very own Myka Williams (pictured left) for his longstanding commitment and leadership as a VAC volunteer and his dedication to supporting communities living with and affected by HIV.

During the VicHealth Awards on Tuesday 5 December, VAC was a finalist and won the VicHealth 'Communications in health promotion' award for the second year in a row! This time around, our 'Action on Ice' project was recognised for our health promotion campaign supporting gay ice users to manage their drug use, and be supported to quit.

WORLD AIDS DAY 2017



This year World AIDS Day was a wet one! But rain or shine, over 78 volunteers and staff took to the street, helping to hand out some the 41,000+ red ribbons distributed this year and raise funds for VAC. This year we also introduced mobile kiosks at various sites throughout Melbourne as well as street pavement stencils. Along with the street advertising and a couple of HUGE night time projections, this year's campaign reminded folks that #HIVStillMatters. *Photos by Christine Weber*



VAC ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Photos by Caleb Hawk



INFORMATION



Photo Courtesy: Revolution 360



25 YEARS OF THE VICTORIAN RED RIBBON

In the lead up to World AIDS Day, a special members event celebrated the 25th Anniversary of the Victorian Red Ribbon. The event welcomed over 70 guests. Speakers on the night included Tex McKenzie (long-serving VAC staff member) and Chris Gill (founding member of VAC and designer of the original VAC logo). Tex spoke of the origins of the ribbon and how it came to prominence, which also included a rendition of Advance Australia Fair by famed Opera singer Merylina Quaife. This paid homage to Joan Carden who originally wore the ribbon and performed the same song at the 1992 AFL Grand Final. Chris explained how he developed the original logo in response to a design competition. At the close of the event all guests were presented with copies of *Under the Red Ribbon* and the commemorative edition silver edged red ribbon.

Photos by Andy Miller, Imaginarium Photography.

WORKING TOGETHER: COMMUNITY

Every year, we work with various community organisations, small businesses, sporting clubs, artists, and community groups. Here's just a taste of some of the partners we've been proud to collaborate with and support during the past year.



TRANSTRAVAGANZA. Photo by Eliza Montgomery (Instagram @eljatitude)

MYRIAD COLLECTIVE

Myriad collective is a group of trans and gender diverse (TGD) artists and organisers who create performance and exhibition opportunities for other TGD artists, focusing on those who are marginalised in a number of ways. The collective started 2017 with the Convergent Pathologies exhibition, a Midsumma Premier Event, at Incinerator Gallery. Coordinated by Project Manager and Exhibition Curator Darcy T. Gunk, this exhibition explored the intersection of trans and gender diverse identity and mental illness.

Myriad's fourth annual IDAHOBIT event, *Transpossible*, moved from Northcote Town Hall to Library at the Dock this year. *Transpossible* encompassed a month-long exhibition, two nights of performance showcase, and a creative industries workshop discussing ways that trans and gender diverse artists can create supportive arts communities. As in previous years, *Transpossible* quickly sold out and raised a portion of the funds required for 2018.

The final event of the year for myriad collective was TRANSTRAVAGANZA, a smorgasbord of works by some of Melbourne's top TGD performing and visual artists. TRANSTRAVAGANZA was held in partnership with Footscray Community Arts Centre as part of the Melbourne Fringe Festival, and managed by myriad's Production Manager, Zakaria Shahrudin.



Russell Vickery in *My Other Closet the Cabaret*. Photo by Terry Murphy

MY OTHER CLOSET, THE CABARET

"*My Other Closet, the Cabaret* is a moving and highly effective platform to raise awareness about domestic violence in the LGBTI community. This project goes above and beyond the usual health promotion posters or brochures by not just telling us what this issue LOOKS like, but provides genuine insight in to what it actually FEELS LIKE!" – Simon Ruth, CEO VAC

One part performance, one part education and awareness raising campaign — *My Other Closet, the Cabaret* is a firsthand account of Russell Vickery's true life journey to domestic violence survivor.



MEET MARK

VAC's Alcohol & Other Drug (AOD) Services Team has grown recently to continue to meet the needs of our LGBTI communities. For this newsletter, we chatted to Mark, one of the newest members of the team.

Where were you before VAC?

I was at Launch Housing, Southbank — a 51-bed crisis accommodation service. I was part of their Alcohol & Other Drug (AOD) team. I have worked in the Alcohol & Drug space for the last 8 years.

What is your role at VAC?

My role at VAC is Care & Recovery Coordination, better known as CRC. I sit within the AOD team. It's a case management role working with clients with complex needs. CRC has been around since 2014, a new treatment stream introduced with the recommissioning of the sector.

What brought you to VAC?

I have been involved in the Re-Wired 2.0 program as facilitator since late 2015 and the Re-Wired Program since the start of 2017. I get the best of both worlds — a job that I love working AND working within a community that I am a part of!

What's one aspect of LGBTI health you would love to see change for the better?

Gee just one?! With marriage equality, let's keep heading towards equality more broadly.

What's a fun fact about yourself that people might not know?

[smirks] Anyone who knows me, knows that I am quiet and reserved...just ask our team leader Garth!

Hmm we're not sure we're buying that. One last question, what's one song you're listening to right now?

It's December, so...Mariah Carey's *All I Want for Christmas*.

PARTNERSHIPS IN ACTION

(continued from page 6) With powerful storytelling and reworkings of classic pop songs, *My Other Closet, the Cabaret* was written with the help of experts to educate audiences on intimate partner and relationship violence in LGBTIQ relationships and to motivate audiences to create change. It is a truly groundbreaking initiative presenting a rarely acknowledged topic in a unique way.

Through VAC's support, the project received both Yarra City and City of Melbourne community development grants. Led by Matthew Parsons of MAROPA Productions in partnership with VAC, TGV, GHLV at ARCSHS, and Switchboard; it was presented as part of a custom tailored training event for over 300 staff members from mainstream services. This training event was the very first free training event on the topic and the largest to date in Victoria. *My Other Closet, the Cabaret* was then presented across 10 public performances to a further 485 members of the public.

The impact of the performances extended beyond the live audience members through the tremendous media coverage it received. This ranged from Buzzfeed, The Guardian, News.com.au, Star Observer, BentTV, ABC Radio News, JOY 94.9, and 3CR. Combined with the social media campaign, the initiative reached an high number of people and educated them on LGBTIQ domestic violence.

My Other Closet, the Cabaret has proven to be an extremely innovate and effective health promotion tool, breaking new ground on an emerging health issue. VAC & MAROPA Productions are now looking towards working together on rural and interstate opportunities to widen the positive impact of this great initiative.

www.myotherclosetthecabaret.com

WRAINBOW WRITERS – BALLARAT SQRIBBLERS

In March 2017, the Equality Roadshow drove into Ballarat and as a local Queer woman, KL Joy went along to see what it was all about. Seeing a passion and commitment to change in the region and after meeting representatives from Ballarat Central Library



Wrainbow Writers - Ballarat sQribblers.

Photo Courtesy KL Joy

and VAC, KL was inspired to create Wrainbow Writers – Ballarat sQribblers; a group that was designed for LGBTIQ+ people over the age of 25 to explore creative writing.

The aim was to bring this concept to the region at a low cost. Having public liability insurance that would cover the group's access to the meeting space proved to be a challenge. This is where VAC stepped in. Wrainbow Writers – Ballarat sQribblers officially launched on IDAHOBIT day, 17 May 2017, in the main room of the library.

Throughout the year, Wrainbow Writers – Ballarat sQribblers has been joined by guest authors, Dr. Quinn Eades, who ran his "Writing: the body" workshop and Grant Howie who talked about techniques for writing structure that gets writing to publishing standard.

In December, the group had their break up party, where they shared their favourite stories they'd written that year. The impact on the people who have participated, especially throughout the difficult YES campaign, was a palpable one, and most people managed to challenge the feelings of rage and vulnerability with words on the page.

Without VAC's assistance, this class for the LGBTIQ+ community in Ballarat might have only been a work of fiction.



Charlotte's portrait on the back cover of the [2016/2017 VAC Annual Report](#), raising awareness of international transphobia.

I'M WITH VAC: CHARLOTTE

When did you first get involved?

My first encounter with VAC was actually through the Pronto! service. I remember making small talk with the guy performing the rapid test. He told me all about VAC and the work they do. I was instantly sold! I knew VAC was an organisation I had to get involved with. I love everything that VAC stands for. It's such an important organisation for LGBTI and PLHIV communities. And as a queer transwoman, I absolutely love that VAC are expanding their services to trans and gender diverse individuals.

What has been the most rewarding part of volunteering?

As cheesy as it sounds, everytime I volunteer it's really rewarding— from answering phones at reception to handing out World AIDS Day ribbons.

Does anyone else in your life volunteer?

My mum, Renea, is actually a VAC volunteer too! She's really supportive of the LGBTI community and loves volunteering! I sometimes feel like she's more involved with VAC than I am!

You're featured as a model in this year's VAC Annual Report. How was that experience?

It was fantastic! And I think the photos featured in the Annual Report really humanise the issues being faced by LGBTI communities. I think they're all so spectacular, and it was really an honour to even be considered for such an opportunity. It's an incredibly powerful message, and I really think it should be. It speaks loudly and hopefully we as a community can really help those in these horrible situations.

WHATS ON!



14 JAN

MIDSUMMA CARNIVAL

Melbourne's LGBTIQ cultural festival kicks off in a big way with Carnival in Alexandra Gardens. Don't forget to call into the VAC tent to say hello! midsumma.org.au/program/carn18

16 JAN

The 2018 Hypothetical: *Rainbow Haven*

Our annual Hypothetical throws an all-star panel into a fictional narrative to tackle a range of social issues. Moderated by comedian Adam Richard, this year's hypothetical is traveling to *Rainbow Haven* for an out-of-this-world storyline. How will this year's panel handle it? Tickets to this event are FREE, but spaces are limited and spots go fast! Get yours at: midsumma.org.au/program/vac18 or watch it on Channel 31 and Facebook Live.



17-28 JAN

Company of Men

Our *Staying Negative* and *DownAn'Dirty* campaigns are working with this year's CoM exhibition as this artistic exploration of all things 'masc' goes northside. midsumma.org.au/program/com18



20 JAN

CoM: Market Day

As part of this year's Company of Men exhibition, Market Day will feature a range of creations by queer artists to peruse or purchase on the day. midsumma.org.au/program/commkt18



26 JAN

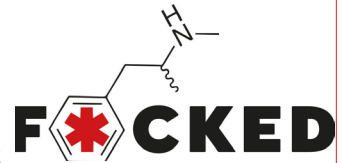
Mooning 2018

The Laird hosts perhaps the cheekiest community fundraiser of the year. Mooning sees guys bare all to raise funds for VAC's David Williams Fund. A night to make your whole week. *The 18+ event is restricted to cis & trans men only.* midsumma.org.au/program/moonin18

24 JAN

F*cked! Forum

Hosted by DownAn'Dirty, this FREE forum at the CoM exhibition takes a look at sexually adventurous men, risk taking, chemsex, intimacy, and much more. midsumma.org.au/program/fck18



28 JAN

Pride March

Join us and our colourful community as we take to the street for the annual Pride March down Fitzroy Street in St Kilda. It all kicks off at 2PM! midsumma.org.au/program/pride18



20 FEB

Volunteer Info Session

Trying to figure out how you can get involved as a VAC volunteer? Head to the PLC (51 Commercial Road, South Yarra) from 6PM. Register at: <https://victorianaidscouncil.typeform.com/to/iVplhB>



9-12 MAR

ChillOut

Make your way to Daylesford for the biggest Queer Country Pride Festival over the Victorian long weekend. Carnival, Bush Dance & the parade — we'll be there for all the festivities. PLUS, this year will include the launch of *Reach Out, Reach Up* — our project partnership with VicHealth that aims to change cultures of risky drinking among LBQ women in regional Victoria. chilloutfestival.com.au

You can stay up to date on all the latest across the organisation including news and events online at vac.org.au or check us out on facebook.com/VAC.org.au, or follow us on [Twitter @VACorg](https://twitter.com/VACorg) or [instagram @vac.org.au](https://instagram.com/vac.org.au)!