

Union walks the rights road with LGBTIQ members

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“All people must have equal rights,” declared Federation’s **1978 Sexual Discrimination policy**. “The Federation therefore opposes discrimination against any person on the grounds of sex, sexuality or marital status. It will actively oppose such discrimination in all places of learning.”

As we approach the end of LGBTIQ History Month, we reflect on the decades past where Federation members have banded together to advocate for the rights of their union colleagues who identify as members of the LGBTIQ community.

Federation hosted a **symposium in 1980** to support gay teachers and [students\[RS1\]](#). Early in the decade, Federation also established the **Gay and Lesbian Special Interest Group**.

It was “terrific” working on policy as a member of the SIG said Federation Life Member Frank Barnes. Its existence was an indication to other members that there were many teachers on the LGBTIQ spectrum, he added. Frank was part of a team of members who tackled how Federation was going to address the HIV/AIDS virus and went on to support LGBTIQ members and advocate on LGBTIQ issues in a myriad of forums.



The union’s **1996 Sexual orientation and gender preferred identity policy** stated discrimination of any sort was an infringement on members’ rights and any discrimination must be challenged and eliminated. “Federation is committed to ensuring that the concerns of lesbians, gay male, bisexual and transgender members are addressed. Every endeavour will be made to promote the general welfare, personal and industrial rights of these members.”

Former Federation president (2002–2008) Maree O’Halloran said it was really important to her that Federation was open and welcoming and that she was able to see people like Federation Officers Frank Barnes and David Wynne being visible, being strong and creating space for everyone. “The 1996 policy said to me the union was proud of all its members,” she also said.

The **2011 Gender, sexuality and identity policy** committed the union to protecting the industrial, professional and civil rights of LGBTIQ members and all LGBTIQ people. It reads: “The discriminatory practices of homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, heterosexism and monosexism are infringements of members’ rights, the rights of students we teach and the rights of individuals within the communities in which we work, and must be challenged and eliminated.”

“It was a totally awe-inspiring, personal milestone to contribute to the union and the gay community,” said David Willis, who was on the Restricted Committee that drafted the policy. “It was a very affirming experience because we worked collaboratively to get ideas up and running.”

David said he had been brutally harassed as an openly gay teacher appointed in Cobar back in 1992. The union had helped him get a transfer, for his own safety. "It showed me the power of the union and how significant issues can be for individuals."

"Federation's longstanding history of supporting the LGBTIQ community and the 2011 Annual Conference-endorsed LGBTIQ policy brings me overwhelming pride in my union," said member Alicia Heymel.

"I first became aware of Federation's advocacy of LGBTIQ members when the Federation's LGBTIQ officer was mentioned at an association meeting. As a queer-identifying beginning teacher, teaching in a community with no visible allies or community, the knowledge that my union stood with me was a welcome relief."

Not long after, Alicia joined the LGBTIQ Special Interest Group and was eventually elected as a Restricted Committee member. "I was encouraged to be more actively involved in the union movement through connecting with like-minded colleagues and members in the SIG."

"Developing an updated LGBTIQ Federation policy highlights how far this union and public education system in NSW has come and the equities still being fought for," Alicia added.

In support of the LGBTIQ community Federation has hosted a stall at the **Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras** Fair Day since 2010. The union entered its first float into the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras parade in 2015.

Member Brendon Bearman said it was lovely to know the union has lots of LGBTIQ visibility and pushes for inclusion. Brendon joined the SIG when he transferred to Sydney. "It's nice to connect with other people," he said about volunteering at Fair Day. Brendon said marching in Federation's first Mardi Gras float was amazing. "We got a lot of good energy from the crowd," he recalled.

Federation shared that energy when the union encouraged members to **vote "yes" in the 2017 marriage equality postal survey** about legalising same-sex marriage. While the end of LGBTIQ history month approaches, your union will always continue to fight for equality for all members.

[Click here](#) for more information about the LGBTIQ Special Interest Group.