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### **BYASS: A positive environment to help teens feel they belong**

**Amanda Matthews**, Youth Worker, Spiritus Beenleigh Youth Accommodation and Support Services (BYASS), talks about suicide prevention and young people.

BYASS provides teenagers and their families with support during times of crisis, through high quality service and an holistic response to young people, who, for a variety of reasons, are at risk of homelessness. Of significant concern within this section of the community is the incidence of youth suicide, the highest numbers coming from young people who are questioning their sexuality or identify as gay, lesbian, bi-sexual or transgender (GLBT).

*“Current research indicates that 20.8% of gay males and 29.4% of bisexual / undecided males have attempted suicide compared to 5.4% of heterosexual males. Further, 28% of lesbian young women and 34.9% of bisexual lundecided females have attempted suicide compared to 8.3% of heterosexual young women. Transgender young people are four times more likely to attempt suicide.”*

Some of the significant factors that have an impact on these statistics are violence and bullying, discrimination and harassment, loss of friendship or family rejection.

*“They often feel very isolated, lack support, face difficulties such as becoming homeless and fear that someone will reveal their orientation, particularly to their parents.”*

BYASS' positive approach means that all young at risk people, regardless of sexual orientation, can feel secure and safe and in a non-judgmental environment. In addition to the accommodation available to some young people following assessment, BYASS staff provide workshops, programs and family mediation and counselling, the aim being a resolution of conflicts between young people and their families and in the hope of reconciliation and a return home where that is appropriate.

Additionally, BYASS are hoping to increase their level of care for GLBT youth in the local area through the provision of a regular meeting place, where they can relax, have a barbecue, watch videos and make friends, all in a welcoming understanding environment.

*“...a positive environment where they can be themselves, enjoy each other's company without any fear. That's what we would want for all our children, straight or gay.”*

**For further information about Beenleigh Youth and Support Service, please contact the service manager Heather McAllan, on Ph 3807 5715 or email [hmcallan@spiritus.org.au](mailto:hmcallan@spiritus.org.au)**

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