



# ONE YEAR ON AS THORNE HARBOUR

On 12 July 1983 - with the successful decriminalisation of homosexuality a couple years earlier, we were only just starting to see the fruits of gay and lesbian liberation when the storm clouds of an emerging health crisis started to gather.

During a community meeting at the Laird Hotel, a brave cohort of individuals put their hand up to be part of the creation of the Victorian AIDS Action Committee. Their foresight, courage, and sense of justice set the foundation of what is now Australia's oldest HIV/AIDS organisation and one of the largest LGBTI health organisations in the country.

Last year we entered the next stage in our evolution. We've gone from the Victorian AIDS Action Committee to Victorian AIDS Council/Gay Men's Community Health Centre to VicAIDS to VAC.

Drawing inspiration from community activists like Alison Thorne and Keith Harbour, we are now Thorne Harbour Health – committed to advocating for the health and wellbeing of our gender, sex, and sexually diverse communities.

One year on, we're still telling our origin story to stakeholders who may not understand the transition, and that's ok. In fact, it is a great opportunity. As the recent Stonewall anniversary reminds us, it is paramount that we not forget our past. It offers a fundamental lesson about the importance of community mobilisation and activism.

Our history also teaches us about the importance of unwavering commitment.

Following the lifesaving introduction of highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART) in 1996, a collective sigh of relief swept through our community. After years of caring for and supporting our communities in the face of a deadly epidemic, many were in desperate need of respite, but there was still so much work to be done.

Today our LGBTI and PLHIV communities come a long way, but there is *still* so much work to be done.

While some in our community are still catching our breath after a divisive and vitriolic public debate about marriage equality, the current dialogue around religious discrimination threatens our progress toward equality, respect and inclusion.

In 1975, the inaugural National Homosexual Conference asked 'can gay men and lesbian women work together?' here in Melbourne. Today, we continue to work through issues of cooperation and intersectionality with a far more diverse collection of communities. Our priorities and paths often vary, but we share a collective vision – to advance our communities toward a society of shared dignity and equality.

Thirty-six years later, the values to get us there are much the same – leadership, diversity, inclusion, justice, courage, and optimism. Optimism can often be the most evasive in the face of the seemingly endless array of battles our communities face. It is a vital ingredient though – without it we lose the fuel to keep moving toward a better future.



## MENTAL HEALTH ROYAL COMMISSION

A joint submission on LGBTI mental health was prepared by Thorne Harbour Health, Rainbow Health Victoria (formerly Gay and Lesbian Health Victoria), and Switchboard, for the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. The submission included a supporting joint statement signed by 43 leading community health service providers.

Thorne Harbour Health also partnered with Living Positive Victoria and Positive Women Victoria to prepare a joint submission to the Royal Commission on how to improve the mental health and wellbeing of people living with HIV. The submission, which was endorsed by the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society at La Trobe University, made a range of recommendations to ensure sustainable service provision and to end HIV-related stigma, discrimination and criminalisation.

The Royal Commission is an unprecedented opportunity to create improvements to mental health policy and service delivery frameworks that will transform quality of life for Victorians and save lives, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and gender diverse, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) Victorians and Victorians living with HIV.

All LGBTIQ people and people living with HIV deserve to live happy and healthy lives, and to enjoy the benefits of a mental health system that is safe, affirming and supportive.

While the majority of LGBTIQ people and people living with HIV are happy and content, many still experience a range of poor health outcomes. In particular, poor mental health outcomes associated with disconnection from family or communities, stigma, discrimination, harassment and abuse are known to exist.

Too many LGBTIQ people and people living with HIV delay or avoid seeking health services due to actual or perceived stigma and discrimination, and the lack of an affirmative provider. To address these issues, our joint submissions call for a sustained, high-level commitment to system-wide mental health prevention, early intervention and treatment initiatives.

You can find these submissions online at: [thorneharbour.org/about/policy-advocacy/](https://thorneharbour.org/about/policy-advocacy/)

# GUYS LIKE ME. GUYS LIKE YOU. GUYS LIKE US.



Earlier this year, Thorne Harbour and ACON's joint national health promotion initiative for same-sex-attracted men — Emen8 — launched a campaign with [a new interactive map](#) to help thousands of guys locate sexual health testing services nearby and across Australia.

Following its success, in June the Emen8 team delivered another timely and impactful campaign that speaks to the real world experiences of guys across Australia — this time, focussing on combination approaches to HIV prevention.

'Guys like me. Guys like you. Guys like us' is all about using and combining four different HIV prevention methods that align with our national HIV strategies: condoms, PrEP, an undetectable viral load and PEP.

We know that HIV prevention is no longer a one-size-fits-all approach or a condom every time message. The campaign is about educating guys on the many different ways there are to prevent HIV and encourages them to have conversations with their sexual partners. In particular, reinforcing the benefit of using condoms in conjunction with other HIV prevention strategies as a highly effective way to help prevent many STIs — especially in casual sex settings where swapping contact details might not be top priority.

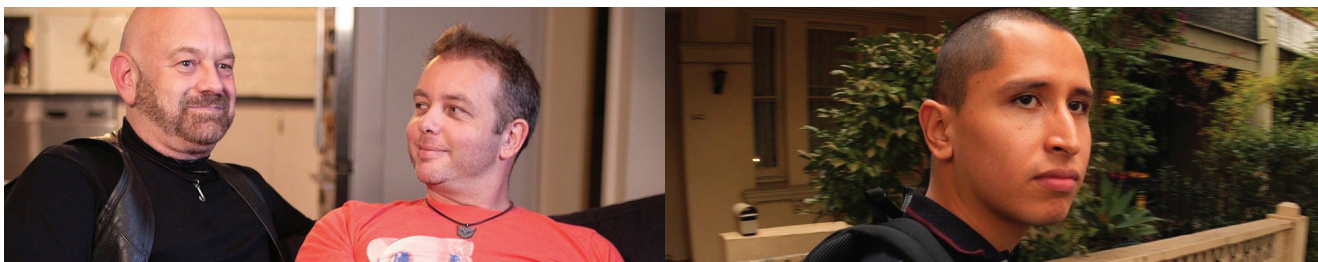
The Emen8 team travelled to film a diverse range of six individuals and couples in their own homes showing a real life, relatable experience through a series of candid interviews. The videos provide a glimpse into these men's lives, offering a very human perspective of real guys making real choices.

**Wade** is an Aboriginal/Polynesian Australian who uses condoms when he and his partner invite other guys to join them. Jason and **Jeff** have been in an open relationship for almost eight years and both use PrEP. **Johann** grew up in Sri Lanka and uses HIV treatment to stay undetectable. **Tom** has been using PrEP ever since he completed a course of emergency PEP when he was 19. Married couple, **Gregory and Michael** sometimes have sex with other guys and rely on condoms to keep themselves and each other safe. **Carlos** recently arrived to study in Australia and has had good experiences disclosing his undetectable status as well as organising his HIV treatment without Medicare.

Additionally, the campaign features interviews with **Dr. Vincent Cornelisse**, sexual health practitioner, talking about his experience working with gay and bisexual men. Dr Vincent encourages guys to find a doctor they trust, start a conversation about sexual health and reiterates that all of these HIV prevention options are available for trans and gender diverse people too.

The 'Guys like me. Guys like you. Guys like us' campaign has engaged a national audience of men at a time when innovative ways to prevent HIV are really taking off. Throughout Australia, an increasing number of men are opting in to PrEP at the same time as the U=U message is rippling through communities of men who have sex with men. The timing is right to show how the ongoing efforts of guys who are choosing and combining the various different ways to prevent HIV is having a huge impact on reducing the number of HIV transmissions across Australia.

Check out [emen8.com.au](http://emen8.com.au) or find Emen8 on Facebook: [www.facebook.com/Emen8](http://www.facebook.com/Emen8)



## NORTHSIDE BIZARRE

Saturday 19 October, 12-7PM

The Laird Hotel, Collingwood Masonic Hall & Henry Street, Abbotsford

Northside Bizarre brings our community tribes together for a one-day street party to benefit Thorne Harbour Health's David Williams Fund and JOY 94.9 with the generous support of the Laird. Have a go at bidding in the live auctions, sample the sweets at MasterBaker, check out a kinky demo at the Laird Stage, hunt for a steal in Leather & Treasure or enjoy a snag at the BearBBQ. This gender inclusive event is 18+. To make Northside Bizarre 2019 a success, WE NEED YOUR HELP. We're looking for donations of auction items from small businesses, local artisans, etc. To find out more, head to:

[www.northsidebizarre.com](http://www.northsidebizarre.com) or [www.facebook.com/northsidebizarre](http://www.facebook.com/northsidebizarre)

# A NEW LOOK IN SA MORE FROM EQUINOX

**S**AMESH (South Australian Mobilisation + Empowerment for Sexual Health), our South Australian based HIV and sexual health promotion program, is entering its fourth year on the scene. What better way to celebrate this milestone than with a brand new website and a new look?!

SAMESH launched in 2015 in Adelaide to provide support and services to people living with or at risk of HIV and the broader LGBTIQ+ community, since then the small SAMESH team has delivered a remarkable portfolio of services, campaigns, events, educational resources and training to communities throughout South Australia.

With the support of SA Health, we're proud to be continuing our partnership with Shine SA to deliver this much needed program for another five years. You may have already noticed the program's new look on social media or in the latest Drama Downunder campaign. You'll also see the program launching a new website with enhanced features and functionalities that will improve its accessibility and further enable SAMESH to connect with our communities. Sign up for the SAMESH digital newsletter to keep in the loop, email: [samesh-enquiries@samesh.org.au](mailto:samesh-enquiries@samesh.org.au)



**T**wo publications have been released by the team at Equinox to better inform how we can address the ongoing health needs of our trans and gender diverse (TGD) communities.

As Australia's first peer-led trans and gender diverse health service, an evaluation of Equinox has been released that takes a closer look at the needs of the our trans and gender diverse communities and evaluates the impact of our service.

The results of this evaluation have been incredibly encouraging. Existing research consistently highlights that a large percentage of TGD people experience trauma and negativity in social settings and health services alike. Equinox is unique service that has been able "to empower, enable and advocate for the medical, mental and social health of TGD clients through its peer-led model."

The outstanding community concern about the service is its capacity to continue to meet the rapidly increasing demand on the service. A concern that highlights the urgent need for funding and resourcing.

The *Hormone Replacement Therapy Prescribing Guide for General Practitioners* has also been recently released. The guide offers a brief outline of the use and monitoring requirements for clients accessing hormone replacement therapies. The guide has been prepared for use by medical practitioners to help them safely and confidently prescribe HRT to their TGD clients.

Both of these publications are available on the Thorne Harbour website. Head to: [thorneharbour.org/about/publications/](http://thorneharbour.org/about/publications/)

# TAKING THE PARTI TO AMSTERDAM

**I**n early May, Kate Pern and Gaia Miller-Foote from Thorne Harbour Health and Star Health's joint harm reduction initiative, the PARTi Project, had the opportunity to travel to Amsterdam to present at the 11th International Club Health Conference on nightlife, substance use, and related health issues. The conference included presentations from over 300 experts from 25 countries and explored the range of challenges and opportunities for promoting health in nightlife settings. Kate and Gaia presented learnings from the PARTi Project in a session titled 'Safer Nightlife Warriors', alongside a range of other inspiring peer-led harm reduction initiatives from around the globe. Kate and Gaia explored topics such as the paradox of being part of a government funded peer-led project in a climate of prohibition, and emphasized the importance of policy reform around liquor licensing and security guard training requirements to create sustainable change and a safer nightlife culture in Melbourne's late night venues.

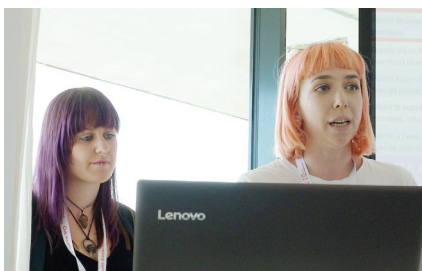


Photo: Kate & Gaia presenting at 11th Int'l Club Health Conference

The conference included discussions around drug checking, effective management of nighttime economies, alcohol and other drugs in nightlife, utilising digital marketing for health promotion, sexual assault prevention and the social benefits of nightlife. For most, it was refreshing to be in an environment where these benefits were universally acknowledged and did not need to be explained. As well as discussing how to reduce harms, threats to nightlife itself were also explored, such as Netflix, Uber Eats and dating apps.

Gaia and Kate were proud to see that the work they were doing, and the many programs at Thorne Harbour Health, were commensurable with others on an international stage. It became clear, however, that Australia is falling far behind on legislation regarding drug harm reduction and data protection. For example, while drug checking (pill testing) is still a highly contentious issue in Australia, a number of the European delegates expressed their surprise at the fact that the need for drug checking was even still being discussed.

The collection of personal data for the purposes of health promotion was discussed with enthusiasm by some of the European delegates yet was met with concern by many of the Australians. This difference in opinion is likely due to Europe's strong data protection laws (the GDPR) and Australia's lack thereof. This begs the question: As the opportunity to utilise data and technology to improve health public health increases, how to we ensure the protection vulnerable communities' privacy?

Kate and Gaia drew much inspiration from a number of progressive initiatives found in Amsterdam. For example, Amsterdam has a drug checking program that has been running for 27 years. The program provides accessible and affordable drug checking at a number of designated health centres within the city. Amsterdam also has a 'Night Mayor' who is responsible for liaising between groups with different vested interests in nightlife, including the City Council, local residents, and party goers. Such initiatives could have amazing potential if implemented in an Australian context.

# OUR VOLUNTEERS FEELING THE LOVE



Photo (clockwise from top left): City of Port Phillip Mayor Dick Gross, Sue Macgregor, THH Vice President Chris McDermott, Mark Brizzi, James Nelson, THH Volunteer Coordinator Daniel Bryen, Wayne Ostler, and Jaron Ngo. Photos by Mel Butters.

Every day, volunteers tackle an array of activities across our sites, services, and programs. The volunteers celebrating significant milestones this year illustrate the many ways you can make a difference.

As National Volunteer Week 2019 wrapped up, we held our third annual LGBTI Organisations Volunteer Event (LOVE) in partnership with JOY 94.9, Switchboard, Transgender Victoria, and the Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives. Held at St Kilda Town Hall, LOVE has become an important time to honour longstanding volunteers as well as thank the army of volunteers that keep so many organisations like Thorne Harbour Health alive and well.



Wayne Ostler (pictured left) has been very hands on since arriving at the Positive Living Centre (PLC) as a volunteer.

"I graduated as a massage therapist, and a mate of mine had been doing massage there for a couple of years. He said to me to come on board. The massages are voluntary, but its good experience to build up in your professional field," Wayne explained.

Sue Macgregor (pictured right) has also brought her professional skills into the Positive Living Centre, and has been doing so for 25 years with the HIV/AIDS Legal Centre (HALC).

"I'm a lawyer and I was aware in the early days that they were really short of lawyers. A friend of mine was volunteering, so I came along."

She adds, "I absolutely love it. I love my clients. I love the meal I get on Thursdays. Love the other volunteers. It's a great place."



One of those volunteers behind the meals Sue speaks so highly of is Jaron Ngo (pictured left). Jaron has been helping in the PLC kitchen for 15 years.

"Basically, I came out and went through the Young and Gay program," he explains.

"I felt like I wanted to give back to the community. I thought serving in the kitchen was the best use of my skill. My day job is in an office, and I wanted something completely different."

Mark Brizzi (pictured right) also helps our communities get access to healthy meals as a volunteer in the PLC pantry.



"Being someone who is HIV positive – I was looking for something to do," Mark said.

And five years later, he's still at it.

When asked why he keeps doing it, he explains, "I keep going for all the friendships I've made – what I call my one-day-a-week friends."

While volunteers like Wayne, Sue, Jaron, and Mark often enjoy face time with clients, many of the community members getting help from James Nelson will probably never see his face.

James (pictured right) has been volunteering for 15 years. He is one of Thorne Harbour's online outreach or 'AppReach' volunteers offering sexual health, mental health, and overall health education via online apps like Scruff and Grindr.



"There was an opening in Outreach, and I really liked the idea of being hands on and helping people," James explains.

"It's been so rewarding. So many guys think there is no way out of their problems. When you talk to them though and you say, 'hey there's people here you can talk to and there's a solution out there...', you can feel the weight lift off their shoulders."

Wayne echoes that rewarding feeling from providing relief to the community.

"I really enjoy it each week. I get very isolated people in to see me. I get people with depression. I get people with physical problems, and just to work on those and to have them walk out saying 'gee I feel a lot better now' – it's what I like."

For Sue, it has been a quarter of a century of 'little highlights'.

"Lots of little highlights and lots of really nice results, clients coming back and saying 'thank you' or seeing people a few years down the track and seeing things are sorted out. Not one big highlight, lots of little ones," she said.

When asked if much has changed during her time, Sue is quick to explain, "Oh my god! Huge changes! In the early days, a lot of my clients were looking at dying. They looked shocking. They were in poor health...now my clients look like everyday people."

In addition to highly effective treatment for people living with HIV, James has noticed recent changes that have affected his work online.

"Technology has improved, and there has been a revolution in sexual health with things like PrEP and such. Still, 90% of the questions are bread and butter questions about how to stay healthy."

He added, "I have to say, I have also learned a huge amount about what gay guys do. I thought I knew a reasonable amount, but BOY have I learned a lot."

What each volunteer takes from their time can vary greatly, but LOVE plays an important role in the bringing those various volunteers together for a night of festivities and thanking them for their meaningful contribution to our LGBTI communities.

As Mark Brizzi said, "Tonight has been a highlight for me - being recognised for my time as a volunteer."

**Interested in volunteering? The next Volunteer Induction Session is on Wednesday 2 October at 6PM. Head to [thorneharbour.org](http://thorneharbour.org) to find out how to register.**