

Abstract submission to 'From Margins to Mainstream'
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**Gender and Diversity Training-Promoting Mental Health through building the
capacity of health professionals**

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**N.B. This abstract forms part of a joint submission from Barwon South Western
Regional Women's Health Resource Workers for a seminar session including
four presentations on the topic "Gender and Diversity in Mental Health
Promotion".**

Introduction

Discrimination is a crucial impediment to the maintenance of mental health and wellbeing for many who may embody characteristics that identify them as 'different'. A key goal of mental health promotion is to ensure that the social, cultural, economic and environmental conditions conducive to good health are accessible to all members of our communities. Attitudes and behaviours that marginalise groups who are defined as diverse in relation to such factors as culture, ethnicity, ability, sexuality, age or religion need to be challenged in order to create a safe, secure and inclusive environment that not only tolerates difference but celebrates it.

1. To rise to this challenge, a women's health resource worker from the Barwon South West Region has collaborated with community groups and health and

community service providers to create a 'Diversity Float' to participate in a mainstream local festival street parade, 'Colac Kana Festival Parade'.

Methodologies and Themes

The 'Diversity Float' initially emerged from work with a group who had formed to challenge homophobia. Through discussions and the development of plans for participation in the Colac Kana Festival, it was suggested that homophobia be addressed as one of a range of forms of discrimination. This strategy enabled the project to bring together a wider range of community groups and individuals who experience discrimination and showcase the positive contribution that these individuals make to our community thus debunking myths and stereotypes and creating an inclusive community and enabling the formation of solidarity with other diverse population groups.

Many individuals, organisations and groups worked together on the float, building social connection and the capacity of those involved.

Charter Recommendations:

- That the Arts be further explored and utilised as a tool for building skills, community and capacity to address the issues that impact on the mental health of individuals, families and communities.
- That the promotion of freedom from discrimination, exclusion and violence become core work of mainstream health services.