



AMBASSADORS &  
BRIDGE BUILDERS  
INTERNATIONAL

June 2015

## CEO ANNUAL REPORT

Ambassadors & Bridge Builders International (ABBI) has been progressively established since its conception by Anthony Venn-Brown, the founder and now CEO.

Through the many emails Anthony received from readers of his autobiography it became obvious that a support network was needed for LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex) individuals from Christian backgrounds. These people had freely shared about experiencing depression and other mental health issues because of their experience as LGBTI in Christian churches. It was not uncommon for these people to also talk about thoughts of suicide, and for some attempts, because of their faith/sexuality conflict and the way they had been treated. Anthony co-founded and established a national network for these people, called Freedom2b, whose mission was to provide support for them on their journey to reconciliation.

After several years Anthony identified a greater need. Whilst it will remain important for some time to support these individuals mentioned above the greater need was to get to the source of the problem. That is, to overcome the ignorance and misinformation about sexuality and gender identity that exists in Australia's churches, Christian organisations, denominations and amongst Christian leaders.

***"It's much better to build fences at the top of the cliff than run ambulances down the bottom. "***

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A group of potential board members first met in August 2012 who would assist in providing governance and oversight of Anthony's new vision. In order to become a legitimate not-for-profit organisation it takes some time to put into place all the legal and government requirements. ABBI became officially certified with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission on 6 July 2013. The organisation functions as an association incorporated with 10 members (board members) and a CEO (non-board member).

***"I just wanted you to know that you are an inspiration to me for the work you do. Reading A Life of Unlearning assisted my mental health and acceptance for myself in a tangible way. I used to be on six antipsychotic drugs and now I'm only on one mild antidepressant. Thank you. It truly did help. I've always been taught that God hates me. I made a lot of friends in conversion therapy. Out of forty, only six are still alive (one died naturally, the rest suicide.) Your book gave me hope and let me see a truer Christ. Keep up the good work" Matt***

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Evidence of the harm caused to LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex) people within religious contexts has been documented in numerous research projects. This evidence also reveals that LGBTI people from faith backgrounds are one of the highest risk groups in several key areas including mental health issues and suicidality. Non-affirming churches, denominations, religious leaders and organisations are usually unaware of the harmful impact their anti-gay beliefs, public and private discourse and even a 'don't ask, don't tell' culture has on LGBTI individuals.

Every step of progress to create acceptance and equality for LGBTI people has been met with opposition from the religious community and leaders. Understandably, this has created an anti-religious position within the LGBTI community. This attitude adds further anxiety and harm to those LGBTI people whose faith is still important to them or remains unresolved. Awareness raising of the specific needs of LGBTI people of faith within their own communities helps provide places of understanding, acceptance and safety.

Ambassadors & Bridge Builders International (ABBI) is committed to ending unnecessary suffering caused by ignorance and misinformation about sexual orientation and gender diversity. ABBI's mission is to create understanding and acceptance for LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex) people, empower community members and build bridges with churches, religious organisations and leaders.

The objects of the association as listed in the constitution are:

1. To promote and encourage equality for LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex) people in:
  - i. Churches
  - ii. Religious organisations
  - iii. Educational institutions
  - iv. Employment and workplaces
2. To provide education and training on the specific issues faced by LGBTI people and the community
3. To create and provide educational resources for LGBTI community members, their families, friends and allies
4. To create and provide resources for people in mixed orientation marriages
5. To pro-actively encourage dialogues with religious leaders, churches and denominations about LGBTI issues
6. To provide consultancy services to churches, denominations and companies on diversity, equality and LGBTI issues
7. To monitor media regarding LGBTI related topics and comment when appropriate.
8. To pro-actively seek print, radio and TV media opportunities to speak on LGBTI issues and raise awareness.
9. To utilize social media platforms to provide information and challenge preconceived ideas, misinformation and falsehoods about LGBTI people, their community and relationships
10. To provide referrals and networking for individuals and organisations that are aligned with Ambassadors & Bridge Builders International's objectives.
11. To encourage bridge building opportunities between the LGBTI community and religious communities that encourages dialogue and breaks down stigma, preconceived ideas and false stereotypes

The ABBI website [www.abbi.org.au](http://www.abbi.org.au) is now up and running. All of the CEO's previous work has been transferred over to the website with over 200 blog articles and a growing number of resources...

***"The enemy is not individuals, churches, 'ex-gay' organisations or political parties; the enemy is ignorance. Change is created by focusing our energies on overcoming the latter instead of attacking the former."***

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Since its inception ABBI has been involved in the following activities.

- Media interviews
- Relevant blog articles
- Writing for academic journals
- Conference and seminars
- Attending the final Exodus Conference in Irvine CA USA
- Reaching out to commence dialogue with, religious organisations and church leaders including mega-church pastors
- Ongoing conversations with other church leaders and mega-church pastors
- Working towards the end of ex-gay/reparative/conversion organisations in Australia.
- Working one on one with individuals experiencing faith/sexuality conflict.
- Consistent social media activities through Facebook and Twitter

Because of its controversial nature, much of the dialogue work that ABBI does is behind the scenes and confidential. The evidence however is seen in changes in attitudes and beliefs.

Churches and leaders move along a continuum. No one moves from anti-gay to gay affirming in one step. It is a process of several steps. There is already a change of climate re the attitude towards

LGBTI within the religious world. Even Hillsong Church says it is welcoming but not yet affirming. As ABBI is the only Australian organisation of its kind, there is enormous potential ahead.

Much of the groundwork has been done over the last couple of years. Now to achieve our long term goals and utilise the current climate, the biggest challenge ahead of ABBI is developing a strong donor base. We need people aligned with the cause who will regularly support our work.

I would like to thank all the board members for their continued support and devotion, particularly the office bearers. We are also grateful to our twenty five financial supporters who have given generously and some sacrificially to this important and sometimes life-saving work.

**Anthony Venn-Brown**

Founder and CEO

Ambassadors & Bridge Builders International