



AMBASSADORS &
BRIDGE BUILDERS
INTERNATIONAL

July 2018
June 2019

CEO ANNUAL REPORT

Contents

The year in review	3
Consultations	3
Submissions	3
Training.....	4
Conference and speaking opportunities	4
Media	5
Posts.....	7
Social media	8
World Pride – New York.....	8
Supporting others.....	9
The Quest to Cure Queers	9
Financial support.....	10

CEO ANNUAL REPORT

If the last 12 months has taught us anything, it is to never assume that even though major progress has been made on LGBTIQ rights and equality, hard won rights can be rolled back. In Australia, since the passing of the same-sex marriage legislation we've had to deal with the Israel Folau fiasco and the Government's pending Religious Freedom Bill. For the first time we have a Prime Minister who is Pentecostal, and even though he's never stated it publicly, most likely believes that homosexuality is a sin and against God's order and that transgender people are sick. He definitely has a loyalty to the religious lobbies.

In the US, the Trump administration is making a concerted, strategic effort to roll back LGBTIQ progress made before and during the Obama years. American politics has become like a reality TV show; not surprising considering the current president made a name for himself on one. Lifelong appointments of conservative judges have been made to the Supreme Court. Eastern Europe continues to become increasingly anti-LGBTIQ. Right wing groups and political parties have taken hold in some areas. Social media seems to fuel and reinforce polarisation. Then of course there are the areas like the Middle East and Africa where LGBTIQ people are criminalised, imprisoned, murdered or put to death. There is much to be concerned about.

ABBI's mission and commitment is now more relevant than ever.

Ambassadors & Bridge Builders International (ABBI) is committed to ending unnecessary suffering caused by ignorance and misinformation about sexual orientation and gender identity. 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.

ABBI's philosophy is:

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

Therefore, our emphasis is always focusing on overcoming ignorance and misinformation with the truth and facts. ABBI gets information out there through as many channels as possible. These include media, social networks, our website's resources and posts, training etc.. Below you'll find specific activities we've been involved in. There have been many wonderful opportunities that once would never have been possible.

It is always encouraging to get feedback from individuals and organisations from time to time. Just the other week I was chuffed to receive an email from the United Nations after my article for an academic journal, '[Sexual orientation change efforts within religious contexts](#)' had been forwarded to them.

From: IE Sexual Orientation And Gender Identity OHCHR
Sent: Thursday, 5 December 2019 8:41 PM
To: anthony@abbi.org.au; 'Joel Anderson'
Subject: RE: Report on practices of so-called "conversion therapy"

Dear Joel and Anthony,

We acknowledge receipt of your incredibly useful contributions which has immediately been shared with the Independent Expert.

Thank you very much for your engagement with the mandate.

The IE SOGI Team

Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation & gender identity

Special Procedures Branch

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

The actual impact our work is often hard to measure. However, the snapshot below, of visits to our website, give some indication of our growing reach.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
2016			361	5,088	2,274	2,703	2,013	5,191	2,702	3,687	3,696	3,343	31,058
2017	2,837	4,868	5,028	4,657	4,208	2,722	3,098	8,127	8,904	5,595	4,447	5,510	61,601
2018	3,525	4,267	5,544	6,224	8,028	5,680	5,694	5,564	6,827	5,876	6,045	4,678	67,952
2019	5,118	24,792	6,882	7,143	10,501	7,745	6,310	10,608	7,011	5,103	4,722	3,323	99,258

The year in review

It's always good to review the year and sometimes surprising to go back over the calendar, communications and posts to see what has been achieved. Here are areas we've been involved in and some of the highlights.

Consultations

From time to time ABBI is called up to provide insight and advise to groups and organisations wanting to understand the LGBTIQ faith world and issues faced. We have provided that to a number of groups such as Amnesty, the LGBTI National Health Alliance, Equality Australia, The Greens, the NSW Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby, ACON, the Catholic Church's Plenary Council 2020 Listening & Dialogue Encounter, the National Taskforce on the LGBTQ+ Conversion Movement, and the Victorian Government.

Submissions

When the government sends a direct email requesting a submission you know your contribution is valued and a detailed response required. Two submissions have been made this year. One was to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee re the Sex Discrimination Amendment Inquiry. That is available [HERE](#) (No.25). The other was to the Victorian Government's [Conversion Practices - Legislative Option to Implement a Ban](#) (submissions yet to be made public)

Training

I love training opportunities where one can invest in LGBTIQ leaders of tomorrow and allies. Two in particular were The Equality Project's [Leadership Training Academy](#) in Brisbane and [Foundational Leadership](#) program in Melbourne.

Another exciting development this year has been invitations to lecture in tertiary institutions. Currently, I spend three hours with each new intake of Masters and Bachelors Social Work students at [The Australian College of Applied Psychology](#) educating local and overseas students about LGBTIQ needs and issues.

Another new opportunity has been providing training for professional counsellors and therapists. I've also delivered two webinars for the [Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia](#) (PACFA). One on LGBTQ conversion practices and faith/sexuality conflict and the other on being gay, lesbian or bisexual but in a straight marriage. Both of those are now available on our [website](#)

Conference and speaking opportunities

There have been several speaking opportunities; Newcastle Writers Festival was one of the special ones. In the evening there was also a QueerStories event where I read an extract from A Life of Unlearning about visiting Jason's graveside. It was one of the most challenging things I've ever read. That is available on the QueerStories [website](#).

At this year's Homosexual Histories Conference in Canberra the emphasis was on the time period before Mardi Gras (1978). I presented on "[Why I Chose Gay Conversion 'Therapy' in the early 1970s](#)".

The [Pride in Practice Conference](#) is an annual event when all the major corporate and government sector organisations come together for 3 days on LGBTIQ training and awareness re diversity and inclusion. I presented on 'Understanding Faith/Sexuality Conflict and Impacts in the Workplace' The summary read:

'Many of us live in bubbles of pride and acceptance. The people in our worlds, that is, family, friends work colleagues, etc., accept and even affirm us. Even where we live geographically makes us feel like being LGBTQ is no longer as challenging as it used to be. This can become an unconscious bias which hinders our ability to understand and help others whose non-work environments are non-accepting and at times even hostile to their true identity. We think the solution is personal acceptance and coming out. If only it was that simple. LGBTQ people from faith backgrounds, if they can negotiate the challenges to come to personal acceptance, face outer conflicts as well. Coming out may create more problems than it solves.'

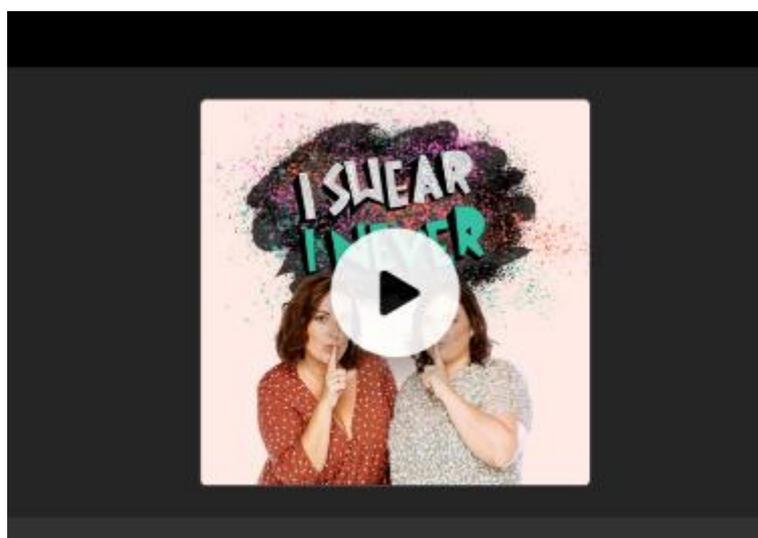
LGBTQ Individuals from faith backgrounds have additional and unique challenges resolving their sexual orientation or gender identity. This is further complicated for those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. 'Bringing your whole self to work' for some LGBTQ people from faith backgrounds, may mean bringing unresolved inner conflict with them; it can never be shut off and is with them 24 hours a day. The intersectionality of religion, culture and family adds levels of stress and intense cognitive dissonance for LGBTI employees affecting their performance and interpersonal relationships in and out of the workplace. A workplace that prides itself on diversity and inclusion can be the only safe space they know.'

At the national [Better Together](#) conference in Sydney I had the wonderful opportunity to co-present with openly gay [Imam Muhsin Hendricks](#). Our session was titled 'God didn't say that, you did' where the Imam spoke about the verses in the Koran referring to homosexuality and I covered the verses from the Bible. The misinterpretation of these passages is pretty much the same in both religions.

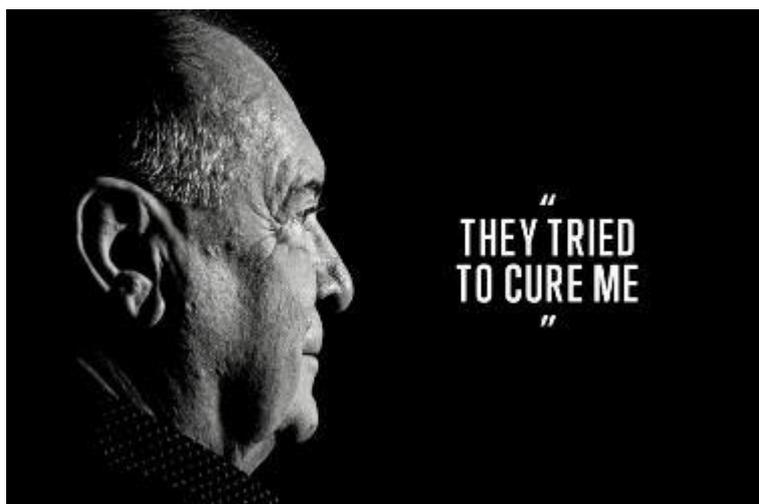
Media

Here are five media highlights from the last 12 months (click on the pics to access):

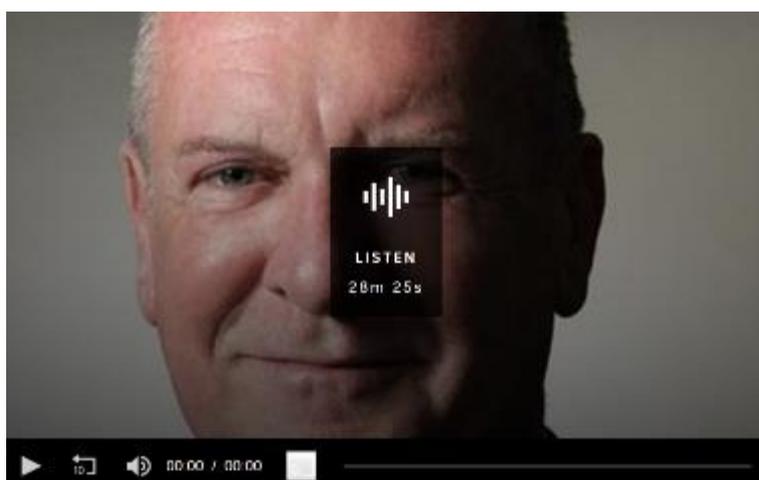
1. Over the years I've done many interviews on radio, TV and for the print media since the first edition of [#ALifeOfUnlearning](#) came out in 2004 in order to raise awareness about the dangers of the 'change is possible' message and LGBTQ conversion practices (#ConversionTherapy) and help LGBTQ people from faith backgrounds. Some interviews stand out and are memorable. This podcast has to be one of the best. I love the way journalists Bek Day and Nina Young took extracts from our hour or so chatting in the studio and wove them together with lovely insights and comments. they've done an excellent job.



2. An extensive Interview with Patrick Strudwick from BuzzFeed UK which was viewed hundreds of thousands of times on their site alone.



3. An interview with Sarah Macdonald on Radio National's ABC Nightlife program



4. Award winning presenter Pat Brittenden's online program, the Department of Conversation, whilst I was in New Zealand. This was longest time I've had in a studio and gave time to dig deeper on issues.



5. Justin Lee (the founder of the Gay Christian Network). Another extensive interview covering a range of issues.



Additionally, the print media often contacts us for comment on relevant topics. Here are just two of those when the Victorian Government announced its plans to ban conversion 'therapy'. The Herald Sun [Banning gay 'conversion' isn't enough](#) and Crikey [It will take more than policy to ban gay conversion therapy](#)

Posts

Our website continues to be a source of information for people to anonymously look for answers. Some of the most viewed and shared include.

1. [Report on Gay Conversion Therapy in Australia](#). This in-depth, behind the scenes account was the first of its kind in Australia. Our 30-page report, with over 100 references, has found its way into the hands of Human Rights organisations, LGBTI health and rights organisations, politicians and journalists.
2. Understanding the difference between [welcoming, accepting, affirming](#) churches is vital when Christian leaders like Margaret Court and churches say they 'love gay people'. Some have gone to churches when told they were 'accepting' and 'welcoming', only to find the essentially they were anti-gay. This meme and article are shared regularly -over 30,000 times so far.
3. A new, extensive, 10,000 word article on [Hillsong](#) has also proved popular as the article revealed previously unknown information about the churches journey with the 'gay issue'.
4. The [resources](#) and also [audio](#) page are visited regularly and shared to educate and inform.

Social media

Our social media profile continues to grow and is used regularly to distribute up to date and relevant information. Our audience is growing.

	2016	2017	2018	2019
YouTube Channel	150 subscribers 137,125 views	184 subscribers 179,481 views	202 subscribers 193,969 views	231 subscribers 208,920 views
ABBI Facebook page	1249 page likes	1,576 page likes 1,501 followers	1,960 page likes 1,891 followers	2,172 page likes 2,161 followers
A Life of Unlearning Facebook page	1632 page likes	1,660 page likes 1,575 followers	2,046 page likes 1,967 followers	2,399 page likes 2,351 followers
Twitter	1445 followers	1,499 followers	1,622 followers	1,722 followers
LinkedIn	1574 connections	1,733 connections 1,680 followers	1,848 connections 1,780 Followers	1,897 connections 1,837 followers
ABBI newsletter	1457 subscribers	1654 subscribers	1776 subscribers	1,989 subscribers

World Pride – New York



This year was the 50 year anniversary of the [Stonewall](#) riots and World Pride was held in New York. Hot off flights from SYD/LAX/NYC, I attended the [Thomson Reuters OUTLAWS 2019](#) conference; definitely the best LGBTQ conference I've ever attended. World Pride put on a [Human Rights Conference](#), which I also attended. I was able to get to several of the events but most of my time there was spent researching, tracking down individuals who were in Greenwich Village in the late 1960s early 1970s, and interviewing them. Honestly, I felt like the trip was charmed. The connections I made, and materials gained are priceless and would never had happened had I not been 'on the ground'. If you are interested in seeing some of the people I connected with you can flick through my [Facebook album](#).

Definitely the most memorable moment of all was sitting in a bar the night of the Stonewall riots and reflecting on exactly where I was and what I was doing on that very night 50 years earlier. It was an emotional moment which I shared on a [Facebook post](#) . It got 100's of reactions and shares.

Supporting others

As time permits, ABBI helps support and promote causes or events which are aligned with our mission. This year's Mardi Gras Film Festival was one of those as was Steven Fales excellent production of '[Confessions of a Mormon Boy](#)'. At the Australian premier of [Boy Erased](#) I was invited to be a part of the Q&A panel after the screening. Of course, what a lot of people were unaware of till that time, was that I actually knew people portrayed in the movie including John Smid (Victor Sykes), the Director of the Love in Action program and played a part in his coming out process.

The Quest to Cure Queers

Had I known exactly how long this new book would take I may not have proceeded. I remember hearing David Johnston, author of the Lavender Scare, saying that he had devoted 10 years of his life to the book and subsequent documentary. I get that now.

The idea of writing specifically on the history of the Gay Conversion 'Therapy' movement came about because of the article I mentioned previously that had been forwarded to the United Nations. The academic journal had asked for a 4,000 word article. I did something I hadn't done before; I sat down and poured out my years of experience and knowledge in this area and ended up with 12,000 words (and conscious of the word limit I was actually holding back). I sought the help of a couple of friends to edit it down. Their response was 'this is fantastic, it could actually be a book'. Not a bad idea, I thought and went away for four weeks to write. That was four years ago.

I've come to realise that this book is actually like a PhD. So, without spending a day in university, or experience in research, I've kept digging, digging, digging (over 60 books, 100s of newspaper articles, 40 interviews and 50 research papers). The process has been a steep learning curve for me, but I know I've uncovered information that no one else has previously written about.

Even though the book remains unfinished, the research so far has been used in some significant articles such as the [Why I chose gay conversion therapy](#), [How, when and why Hillsong banned 'ex-gay' referrals](#), our [Report](#), lectures, presentations and submissions.

Hopefully next year you'll hear the good news about the book being published. One of the top 5 publishers in the world has indicated an interest. In the meantime a website has been created for ['The Quest to Cure Queers'](#) and you can read the first chapter.

Financial support

Our faithful regular monthly supporters, the #ABBIfamily, has remained at 42 individuals; some dropped off and new ones jumped in. Some give \$20 others \$100 or more per month. We've also had 107 people who've made one-off donations to ABBI over this time and had a couple of [CrowdRaisers](#); people who've raised money through their friends.

We are grateful for every single one who gives generously and sacrificially to this important and sometimes life-saving work. If all the people we have helped in some way gave \$1 a day we would be able to expand our work in a significant way and focus completely on our mission. If you'd like to join the #ABBIfamily, you can organise that on [this link](#). If you'd like to have a conversation about ways to help ABBI with fundraising we'd love to talk to you. If this of interest to you then please email me at anthony@abbi.org.au

A full auditors financial report is available. Once again just email us info@abbi.org.au and we'll get that straight off to you. Our thanks go to Martin Coxell who contributed his time to complete the audit.

Finally, I must thank the [board of ABBI](#). Our President, Ian Green, Secretary Tim Daly, Treasurer Bill Wang, Hannah Baral, Anthony Barbara, Byron Barnes and Marguerite Foxon. I am so grateful for their encouragement, support, feedback, expertise and wisdom. They are a great team to work with.

We look forward to serving you, the LGBTIQ community, and the faith community for another 12 months and into the future.

Anthony Venn-Brown

Founder and CEO

Ambassadors & Bridge Builders International

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