



AMBASSADORS &  
BRIDGE BUILDERS  
INTERNATIONAL

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# CEO ANNUAL REPORT

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## Preamble

Another pandemic year which has affected all our lives to varying degrees. Considering the devastating affects Covid has had on many, I consider myself very fortunate. As mentioned in the [previous annual report](#), thanks to the generosity of a friend, I was able to live in a cottage in the Royal National Park during the first lockdown. **It was quiet, tranquil, and isolated.** Occasionally having to get to Sydney meant a lift from my friend to Bundeena wharf, catch the ferry to Cronulla, then an hour long train ride into the city, and do the same returning (first world problems).

**The investiture for the [Medal of the Order of Australia \(OAM\)](#)**, awarded in June 2020, finally occurred at Government House on Wednesday 2 December 2020 and my daughters Hannah and Rebekah were able to join me. Considering the restrictions that were on at the time, it was wonderful that we could celebrate that evening with **80 friends and supporters for a dinner** at a covid safe venue, Universal, in Oxford Street.



Rebekah (left), Hannah (right) at NSW Government House, Sydney, post investiture

Flexibility has been a key during this time, moving face-to-face meetings and in person conferences to online. Just when you think it is safe for us to get back to some degree of normality, we've found ourselves in lockdowns again, or with restrictions. A [Walking Between Worlds](#) seminar, being hosted by a Pentecostal church, had been **cancelled and rescheduled four times**. All going well, we'll be doing that in February 2022.

In January, the cottage in the National Park was no longer available, and I moved into a studio apartment in Marrickville. After nine months, I received notice that the owner was going to sell, so it meant another move; this time into an apartment in the CBD. **For the first time since the end of 2018, after six different accommodation situations, I feel settled.** A place to live and work that feels like home. Fingers crossed it will remain that way for some time and I can get on with my writing projects.

## 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 some highlights.

### Consultations

This year I was asked how many conversion therapy survivors I have worked with over the last 20 years. That was challenging to evaluate. Through my ex-ex-gay yahoo group of 400 I founded in 2000, the hundreds of readers of A Life of Unlearning that emailed me, the national network of Freedom2b and the connections through Facebook, **I estimated around 4,000** who were involved in formal groups and organisations like Exodus, Living Waters and Liberty Christian Ministries. *What about those who were a part of churches and not formal programs who were experiencing faith/sexuality conflict?* I hear you ask. **I wouldn't be able to estimate how many thousands that's been over the last 20 years.**

Put this together with my experience as a high profile Pentecostal preacher for all those years and my personal journey of reconciling my faith and my homosexuality, I guess it makes perfect sense I would be called upon **to help individuals and organisations with my insights, experience, and knowledge.**

These are some organisations I've worked with this year.

- LGBTIQ+ Health Australia
- The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission
- The Queensland, Australia Capital Territory, and Victorian governments regarding the legislation banning LGBTQ conversion practices.
- The New Zealand Ministry of Justice in preliminary discussions re banning conversion therapy
- The Tasmanian Law Reform Institute
- Suicide prevention research specifically about LGBTQ people from faith backgrounds
- The Australian Government re – Religious Discrimination Bill
- Improving Spiritual Health Care for LGBT Australians: Beyond Conversion Practices Research – Steering committee Latrobe University
- Pray Away – documentary on Netflix

- Potential Broadway musical. I got to attend the first reading and give feedback. That was fun. If it makes it to Broadway, I guess I'll have to go over for opening night.....lol.

## Conferences and presentations

The annual Better Together Conference was the only in-person conference I was able to attend this year. It was held in the Adelaide Convention Centre, but Victorians were locked out. This made for some last-minute changes to ensure that all the panel of survivors, researchers and educators were able to deliver their presentations.

I was thrilled to be invited to give the **opening address** at the 8th International Conference on Gender, Sexuality and Queer Theology, hosted by the **Jakarta Theological Seminary (JTS)**. Founded in 1934, JTS is the oldest ecumenical theological college in Indonesia and has a strong tradition of learning, transformative spirituality, and a creative community. The work they are doing amongst gender and sexually diverse people in Indonesia is unique and ground-breaking. Because of sensitivities within Indonesia, the session was not recorded but a PDF of the presentation [“Normal is a cycle on a washing machine”](#) is available on our website

Another exciting opportunity was to speak at the Included2021 conference. [Included2021](#) was a **global conference for Salvation Army leaders and members** who are committed to creating LGBTQ inclusion in the denomination. I gave a presentation on Conversion “Therapy”, its history, evolution and the impacts on individual's lives. That is now available on [YouTube](#).

Presentations were also given to the [Caterpillar Lambda Network](#) , the [Oceania InterPride](#) group, and [LGBTQI+ Health Australia](#) members.

## Media

The biggest media highlights this year have been two popular national programs, **ABC TV's [You Can't Ask That](#)** and **ABC Radio National's [Conversations](#)**.

You can read about the background to *You Can't Ask That* [HERE](#). It is available to watch online on [iView](#).

Once *You Can't Ask That* was aired, the team at [Conversations](#) contacted me to come on their show. *Conversations* is the ABC's most popular podcast. Both appearances produced an avalanche of amazing responses from total strangers who were deeply moved by the stories I told.

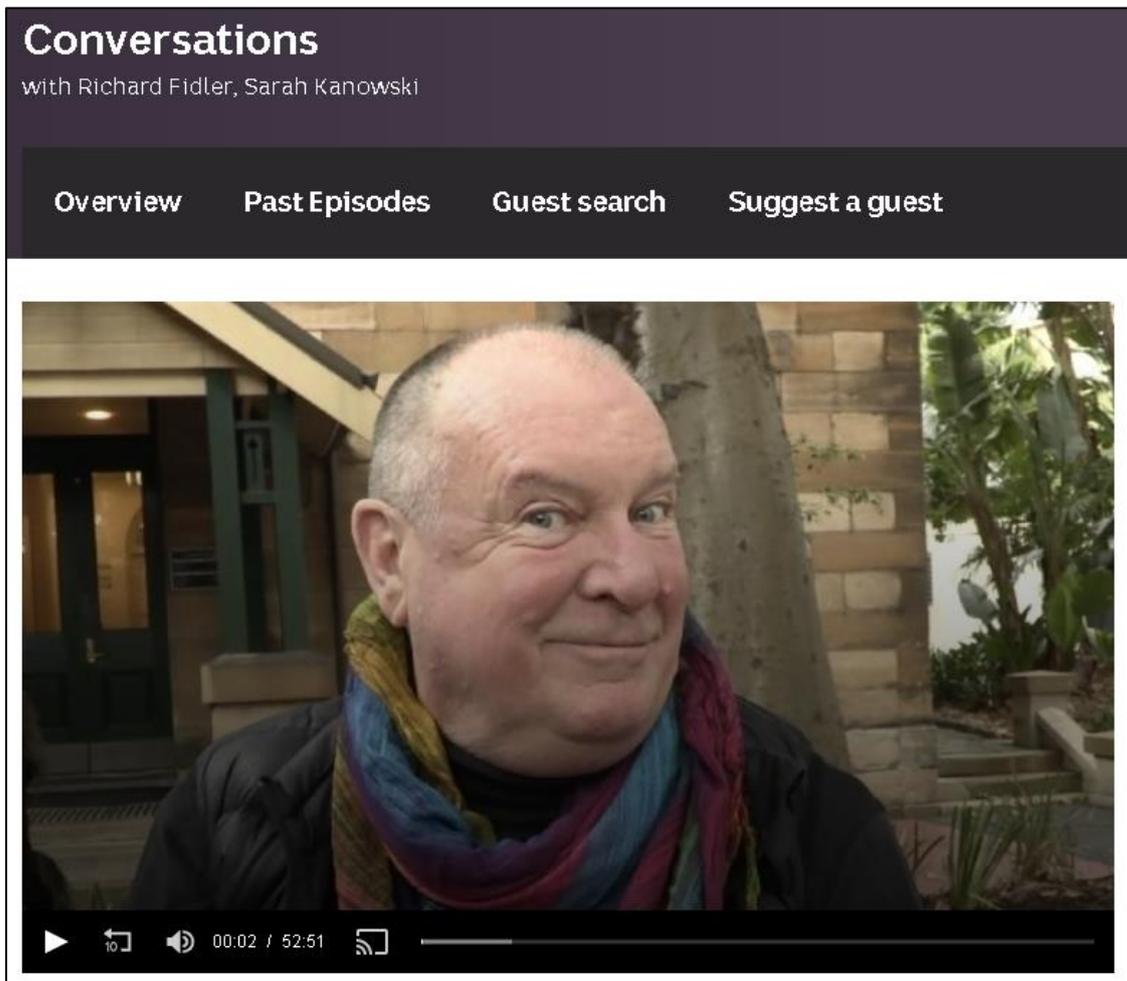
Here's just a couple of examples.

*"I just wanted to write to you and apologise. I was deeply moved as I watched "you can't ask that" and realised the pain that you must have gone through "coming out" and admitting to your 2nd life. As a Christian attending an ACC church, I remember that time well. I also remember what I thought about it all and it was very condemning and judgemental. I want to apologise for that rejection even though a stranger's judgement is pale compared to what you must have felt by your friends and associates at the time. Please forgive me. I'm still confused about the whole issue but I'm not confused about knowing that God loves you and that it is was wrong for me to judge. I'll have to go and buy your book now, so I get the whole story."*

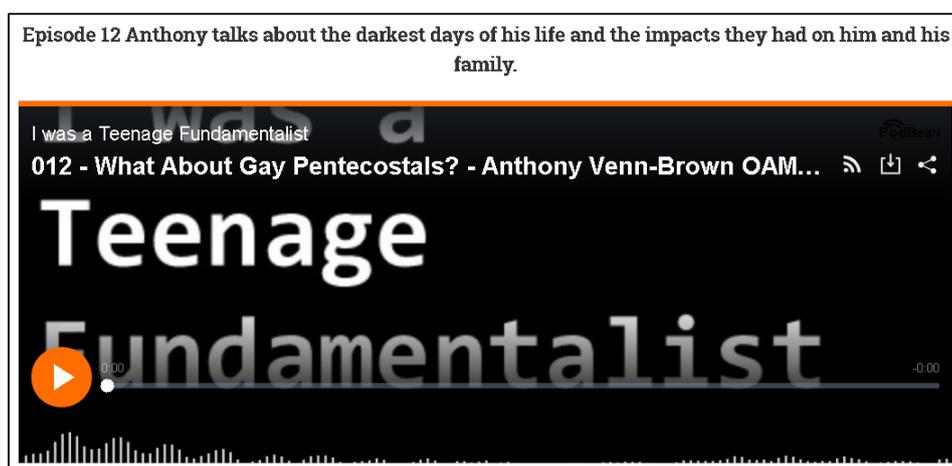
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*"Hi Anthony, you don't know me but I watched you on "You can't ask that" with my 13 year old son and am in the middle of listening to your interview on ABC's "Conversations" podcast. I am so sorry that you have suffered so much pain over the years! Your strength is amazing. But thank you for telling your story - as soon as I get the chance, I will play the podcast episode for them. I am not gay and I don't think any of my kids are, but if it turns out that one (or more) of them is gay, I am glad that they will have your story to take strength from. And if they are straight I am glad that they will learn compassion and gain understanding from hearing your story. Truly, thank you for your advocacy and strength which adds so much to this world."*



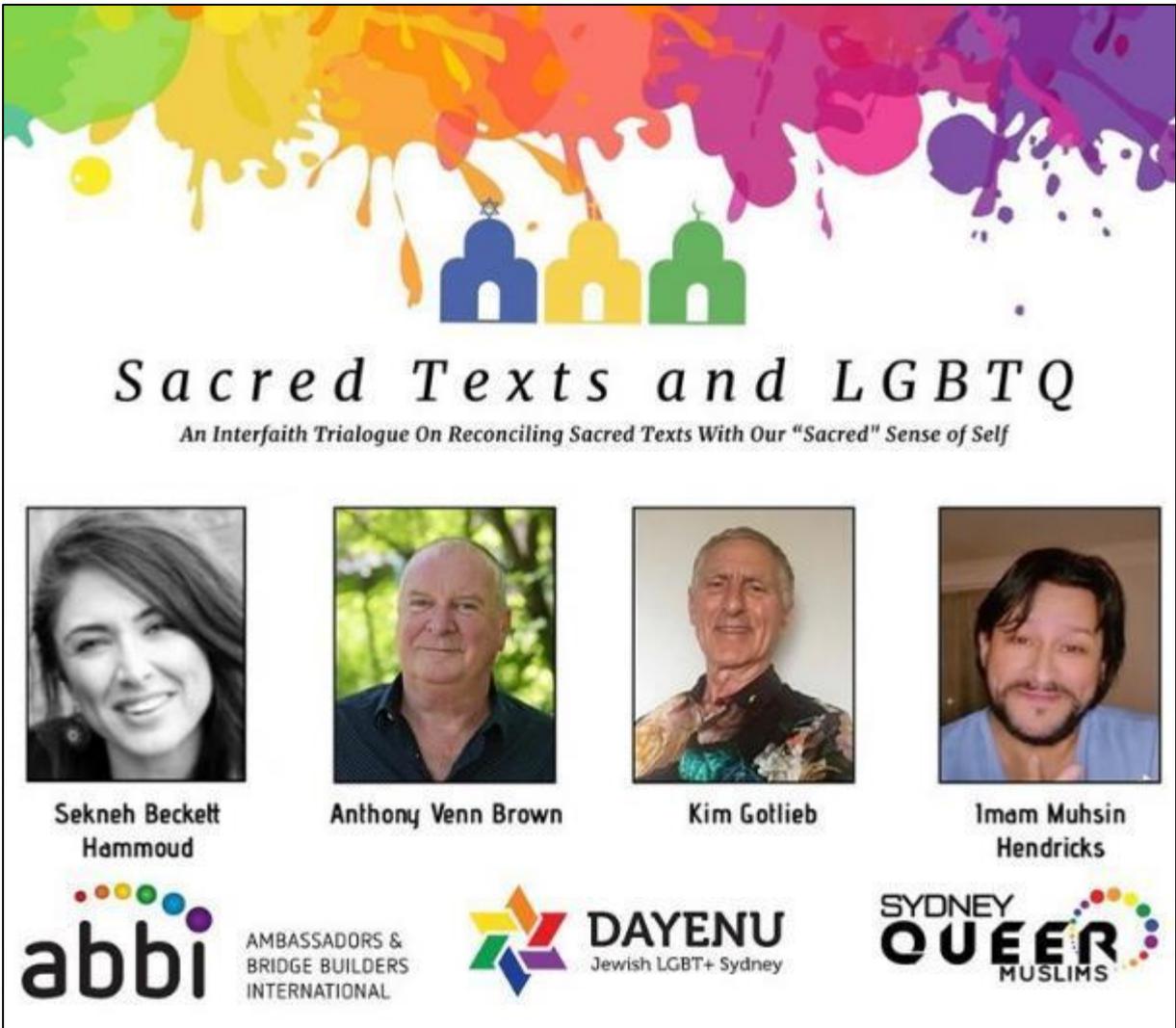


Another highlight for me was being interviewed by B & T on their new podcast, ***I was a Teenage Fundamentalist***. B & T are two guys who were heavily involved in Australia's Pentecostal world in the 80s and 90s. I've observed over the years that some people from a fundamentalist Christian background sometimes gravitate towards toxic connections with others from a similar background. Instead of bringing healing and reconciliation, these spaces tend to keep people fuelled with anger, bitterness and resentment and they can't move on. ***I was a teenage fundamentalist is a very different space. It's healthy, not toxic.*** B & T did three 30 minute interviews. Have a listen [HERE](#).



## ABBI produces a global first

A couple of years ago, I co-presented with a gay Imam at a conference. We both spoke about the impacts of faith/sexuality conflict and finding resolution. **As the Imam spoke about the verses in Koran, the similarity to the verses I knew from the Bible came as a bit of a shock.** I'd never read the Koran before. Knowing also that the Old Testament Sodom and Gomorrah story was, of course, part of the Jewish scripture along with Leviticus, **I thought it would be interesting to organise a panel to explore the sacred texts from each religion's perspective.** I could talk about the Christian texts, the gay Imam about the passages in the Koran and an LGBTQ Jewish person talking about their re-interpretations as well. I was aware that interfaith dialogues had happened before, but not LGBTQ people from the three Abrahamic faiths coming together to compare sacred texts and re-interpretations as far as I knew. It was a great success, with **several hundred attending the webinar.** It continues to be **viewed regularly on our [YouTube channel](#).**



The poster features a colorful paint splatter background at the top. Below it are three stylized icons of religious buildings: a blue mosque, a yellow synagogue, and a green church. The title "Sacred Texts and LGBTQ" is written in a serif font, with the subtitle "An Interfaith Triologue On Reconciling Sacred Texts With Our 'Sacred' Sense of Self" in a smaller font below it. Four speaker portraits are arranged in a row, each with a name caption underneath. At the bottom, there are four logos: abbi (Ambassadors & Bridge Builders International), DAYENU (Jewish LGBT+ Sydney), and SYDNEY QUEER MUSLIMS.

**Sacred Texts and LGBTQ**  
*An Interfaith Triologue On Reconciling Sacred Texts With Our "Sacred" Sense of Self*

**Sekneh Beckett Hammoud**  
**Anthony Venn Brown**  
**Kim Gottlieb**  
**Imam Muhsin Hendricks**

**abbi** AMBASSADORS & BRIDGE BUILDERS INTERNATIONAL  
**DAYENU** Jewish LGBT+ Sydney  
**SYDNEY QUEER MUSLIMS**

## Resources Resources Resources

ABBI's philosophy is “**the real enemy is ignorance**”, therefore we are constantly making resources available to educate, inform and counteract misinformation and ignorance about sexual orientation, gender identity, the LGBTQ community and our relationships.

Our website continues to be a source of information for people to anonymously look for answers. **The ABBI site has Australia's largest collection of articles, information and research on conversion “therapy”** and has been the resource for academics, legislators, human rights advocates, journalists etc. We have [a page dedicated to the topic](#).

During lockdown, I have also used some time to sort out some videos from the past. Some go back to when I began this work of bridge building in 2005, as well as documentaries and TV shows I have appeared in. Instead of being packed away in boxes, these are now on our [YouTube channel](#) people can view and share.

These include

1. [The Bedroom Commandments](#) – a documentary on the intersection of sexuality and religion.
2. [Here I am](#) – a documentary about coming out and Christian families.
3. [Dad's coming out](#) – 60 Minutes segment on being gay and in a straight marriage.
4. [The Cure](#) – the only Australian documentary on conversion “therapy”.
5. [Homosexuality and the Pentecostal Church](#) – a brief documentary project by some of Dr Shane Clifton's students from Alphacrucis College.
6. [A 2006 interview](#) with Dr Shane Clifton (Alphacrucis College), Ron Brookman (Living Waters) and myself. This interview continued to be played to students in the college for years afterwards, until Dr Clifton's employment was terminated. When the video was released recently, a number of people said it was influential in them becoming LGBTQ affirming.
7. [Creating a space for change](#) – this concept is the very foundation of the work of ABBI. Recorded in the Open Door Church in Los Angeles the day after the final Exodus conference that Anthony Venn-Brown had attended.

[Welcoming, accepting, affirming](#) continues to be the most shared article. **Over 50K so far.**

## Submissions

ABBI is often called upon to make [submissions](#) to government inquiries. In the past, this has included Marriage Equality, Religious Freedom and LGBTQ Conversion Practices (conversion 'therapy'). This year, the Tasmanian Law Reform Institute requested a submission. [Tasmania Law Reform Institute consultation - SOGI Conversion Practices](#)

## AVB - a non-academic, academic?

When I finished High School in 1969, I missed out on university matriculation by one subject. I had planned to go to theological seminary, but the lack of a university entrance grade meant I took the path of attending a Bible College instead. Looking back over the years, I'd call myself a self-learner. I never read fiction, always non-fiction. When I was in the ministry, I was always reading relevant books on apologetics, spiritual gifts, church growth, evangelism, and personal development. **I remember when I walked away from everything that left a learning void in my life.** I wasn't motivated to learn anything.

That changed once I found reconciliation of my faith and sexuality. **Suddenly, several new genres opened up to me.** The science sexual orientation, the six passages of the bible presumed to speak about homosexuality, religion and sexuality, LGBTQ history and of course conversion "therapy" have all been topics I've found intriguing.



My current research library on conversion "therapy"

Probably the first academic styled paper I wrote was 12 months after attending the final Exodus conference. [A JOURNEY TO EXODUS – A BEHIND THE SCENES, FIRSTHAND ACCOUNT OF THE EXODUS CLOSURE and "THE TIPPING POINT" ...WHAT WERE THE 8 FACTORS THAT CREATED THE DOWNFALL OF EXODUS?](#) was a 13,000 word article of history, first hand experiences and unique insights.

The next year, I was approached by Sensoria, an academic journal, to contribute a 6,000 word article on conversion “therapy” for their publication. I told the editor, “**I have never spent a day in university**” and wondered if I was able to produce something of the standard they were looking for. They replied “**We’ve read your work already. You are the most informed person on the topic we know.**” That 2015 article continues to be referenced in numerous research papers.

Without a supervisor or academic training, but with the help of a generous friend, I have learnt a great deal about databases, referencing and research. I see my writing in this area becoming more competent and professional. The 2018 [Report on Conversion “Therapy” in Australia](#) was **13,000 words and over 100 references/footnotes**. I think deep down inside; I am a historian at heart. I’ve also come to appreciate the dedication and persistence required to produce a work at PhD level. I had no idea previously.

I’ve been working for several years now on two projects which could be considered PhD level. Who knows? Maybe one day I’ll receive an honorary doctorate for the contributions I’ve made. In the meantime though, I love researching and writing and am grateful that people are finding it valuable.

You can find some of my work on [ResearchGate](#) and also [Academia](#), where somehow I have gained 293 followers.

### **Still supporting individuals and churches**

People continue to contact us for support and information. **Some are troubled individuals**, young people afraid to come out to their Christian families, gay people in straight marriages, religious parents trying to cope with the recent disclosure that their child is gay or trans, pastors who want help working with a person in their congregation who has come out or in conflict with their sexuality. There was a time when I had to engage with each of these people over some time. Often nowadays I can usually direct them to resources on our site or articles I’ve written which deal with their specific need.

Also, I’m currently working with two churches to become [LGBTQ affirming](#). I’m not able to share any more details at the moment as there is still more work to do. **Confidentiality is a key component in this work with churches.**

If you know of any church or Christian leaders interested in learning more about how they might transition their church with minimal polarisation and drama, get them to email me [anthony@abbi.org.au](mailto:anthony@abbi.org.au) to organise a confidential conversation.

## For those who like numbers

Our emphasis is always focusing on overcoming ignorance and misinformation with 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.

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

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
<u>YouTube Channel</u>	150 subscribers 137,125 views	184 subscribers 179,481 views	202 subscribers 193,969 views	231 subscribers 208,920 views	277 subscribers 222,422 views	326 subscribers 221,903 views
<u>ABBI Facebook page</u>	1249 page likes	1,576 page likes 1,501 followers	1,960 page likes 1,891 followers	2,172 page likes 2,161 followers	2,300 page likes 2,319 followers	2,356 page likes 2,380 followers
<u>A Life of Unlearning Facebook page</u>	1632 page likes	1,660 page likes 1,575 followers	2,046 page likes 1,967 followers	2,399 page likes 2,351 followers	2,550 page likes 2,532 followers	2,600 followers
<u>Twitter</u>	1445 followers	1,499 followers	1,622 followers	1,722 followers	1773 followers	1,863 Followers
<u>LinkedIn</u>	1574 connections	1,733 connections 1,680 followers	1,848 connections 1,780 Followers	1,897 connections 1,837 followers	1978 connections 1897 followers	2032 connections 1,950 followers
<u>ABBI newsletter</u>	1457 subscribers	1654 subscribers	1776 subscribers	1,989 subscribers	1,994 subscribers	1,925 subscribers
<u>Instagram</u>	889 followers	997 followers	1,104 followers	1,224 followers	1,322 followers	1,474 followers

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

2016	31,058
2017	92,659
2018	160,611
2019	262,395
2020	316,954
<b>2021</b>	<b>351,282 total</b>

## Financial support

There is only one way our organisation continues. We receive no funding. **Where would be without our #ABBIfamily?** Individuals who believe in the value of our work and either give on a monthly basis or with one-off donations. We are grateful for every single one of you that generously and sacrificially give to this important life-changing and sometimes [life-saving](#) work.

If you are not a part of our #ABBIfamily and you'd like to join, 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. Please email me at [anthony@abbi.org.au](mailto:anthony@abbi.org.au)

A fully audited financial report is available. You can view that on the Australian Charities and Not for Profit Commission [website](#) or email [secretary@abbi.org.au](mailto:secretary@abbi.org.au) for a PDF copy. Our thanks to Martin Coxell, who contributed his time to complete the audit.

## Thanks

Finally, I must thank the [board of ABBI](#). Anthony Barbara stepped up to the role of President/Chairperson. Our secretary is Tim Daly, Treasurer Bill Wang. Hannah Baral and Byron Barnes recently stepped down after seven years on the board. Nicole Conner and Derek Bell joined to take their places. Marguerite Foxon continues to serve on the board along with Tony Rowe. I am so grateful for their encouragement, support, feedback, expertise and wisdom. They are a great team to work with. The Board has been active in improving governance strategies and processes to ensure we always remain compliant with the requirements of registered charities and to ensure our audience, supporters and family can have confidence in the work and messaging of ABBI.

Thank you for taking the time to read our report. I trust you found it informative.

We look forward to serving you, the LGBTQ community, and faith communities in 2022 and into the future.

Please....if you have any questions, feel free to call, text or email.

### **Anthony Venn-Brown OAM**

Founder and CEO

Ambassadors & Bridge Builders International

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