

MEDIA RELEASE

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HOMEGROUND GETS ITS PRIDE ON FOR FIRST TIME

HomeGround Services, one of Melbourne's largest homelessness agencies, will enter Victoria's 2011 Pride March for the first time. The move was driven by the desire to recognise the high number of queer staff at HomeGround and the contribution they make to its vision of ending homelessness in Melbourne. For many years, HomeGround has had in place policies that support diversity in all its forms and tries to harness the skills and experience brought by people from different backgrounds.

In officially endorsing the proposal from staff, Acting CEO Heather Holst said "HomeGround works to get people housed and keep people housed. People experiencing homelessness are routinely discriminated against, not only in accessing housing, but because negative value judgements are made against them based on prejudice and inaccurate stereotypes. The LGBTIQ community also suffers from routine discrimination and prejudice; those who are homeless get hit with a double whammy.

"We are taking part to support our LGBTIQ staff and to recognise the extra barriers faced by our many LGBTIQ clients who are in housing crisis. Our organisational values of people, respect, dignity, choice and diversity are perfectly aligned with the goals of Pride March 2011. Non-LGBTIQ staff will also be marching and are helping to organise the event."

Member of the organising group and outreach worker, Gary Vaughan, said he thought it was about time that organisations like HomeGround got more involved in community events like these and acknowledged the major contribution to welfare services being made by the LGBTIQ community.

"Many of us choose to work in the community sector or areas relating to social justice and equality because we have direct experience of how it feels to be excluded. Organisations like HomeGround naturally attract lots of queer staff and the result is a very inclusive workplace environment where people can be as open about their personal lives as they want. Sadly, Melbourne's affordable housing crisis means that our work is becoming harder all the time, but being part of a talented and passionate group of people who are well supported and working towards a fairer community makes a big difference. It keeps you going.

"Young people coming out to unaccepting family members or struggling to come to terms with their sexuality are also causes of family conflict and breakdown which can lead to youth homelessness. Community attitudes have a great deal of power to both harm and heal. Ultimately it is changing community attitudes that will enable us to achieve equality for the LGBTIQ community and to end the disgrace of widespread homelessness in Victoria.

"We invite everyone interested in supporting us at Pride to meet at the corner of Lakeside Drive and Fitzroy Street St Kilda at 12pm on Sunday 6 February. HomeGround is group #87."