

## **“DIVERSITY-MÜNCHEN” - LesBiSchwule und Trans\* Jugendorganisation**

On 21 December 2017 a meeting took place on the premises of “DIVERSITY “ (a LGBTQ project) in Munich, Germany, with Hannes Warcup, full-time member of staff of the project. The interview was conducted by Bernd Drägestein and Olaf Schwarze; the below minutes are based on notes taken during the interview and completed from memory.

### **Subject of the interview:**

**„How do Schools and other institutions for adolescents deal with Homosexuality and the process of Coming Out and what are the typical experiences“**

### **INTERVIEW:**

*1. Mr Warcup, what is your professional background? And what are your role and responsibilities at the “DIVERSITY” project?*

I hold a B.A. degree in education and I am in charge of a variety of projects:

Professional counselling: Our counsellors are specifically qualified staff and obliged to secrecy. From them, information and support is available for young adults up to 27 years of age, not only for their Coming Out but also regarding any related issues. We are also very happy to offer relevant advice and information to parents and relatives.

What is more, we provide specific counselling and support to schools, social service institutions and teachers newly encountering the issue of “LGB and Trans\*“.

Furthermore, we offer advice and recommendations to parents and relatives on any questions they may have relating to LGBT, facts and input regarding all issues related to Coming Out and on our work at the youth center. Moreover, we are very happy to provide parents and relatives with detailed information on the groups an adolescent may wish to attend with us, and who are not sure exactly what to expect there.

*2. What are the other objectives of “DIVERSITY”?*

*Hannes Warcup:* We are an independent youth center and home to the LGBT\* youth organization Munich. If gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans or queer – our youth center and youth café is open to anybody up to 27 years of age! Our project offers leisure time activities, a coffee shop, sex education, the opportunity to meet and network, and more.

“DIVERSITY”'s sex education project “diversity@school” is a workshop program provided by lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual adolescents, all volunteers, for school classes, youth centers, universities, clubs and associations, and also mobile information booths covering all issues related to sexual orientation and identity.

Adolescent LGBTs are only too familiar with bullying, marginalization and general lack of knowledge. Youths will encounter and will struggle with outdated prejudice and intolerance towards them on a daily basis and in every context. And this is the year 2017! In former Foreign Minister Dr Westerwelle and former Mayor of Berlin Mr Wowereit, Germany already had two high-profile openly gay politicians. Drag queen Conchita Wurst won the Eurovision Song Contest and in many cities around the world Christopher Street Day is a celebration of sexual diversity. You may believe that Germany is a modern, sophisticated country. Research studies into the personal situation of youths, however, still empirically evidence that their reality at schools remains much different.

The teaching resources pack “LesBiSchwules Leben“(LGB life) available from us addresses all these issues in workshop format; in cooperation with the Institute of Pedagogics of the Regional Capital City of Munich ([www.pi-muenchen.de](http://www.pi-muenchen.de)) it is also available in a specific version tailor-made for teachers: Our materials and approach are tried and tested and very suitable for the classroom context in subjects such as German, Ethics or Religion. They are suited for eighth grade and upwards and can be adapted according to the relevant students’ needs. We are happy to present the resources pack at our center, it is available free of charge from the Institute of Pedagogics.

*3. What is the target group of your projects for schools?*

*Hannes Warcup:* The majority of our projects taking place in schools, and usually presented by volunteers, address, and are also mainly inquired by, 7th and 8th graders.

*4. How do you reach, and reach out to schools and their students? i.e. how is contact usually initiated?*

*Hannes Warcup:* It will be committed teachers, social workers and social services who wish to put focus on the subject in their classroom or group who contact us at „DIVERSITY“; also students who wish to organize an educational project or project for their school. Either they will call by telephone or contact us by email through the contact form on our homepage.

*5. Which types of schools inquire your seminars?*

*Hannes Warcup:* Our school projects have been designed to fit all types of middle schools and academic secondary schools and are in use at all of these. While there has been very little demand from special-needs schools, primary schools sometimes do inquire with us. Apart from ready-made projects for the classroom we are also happy to advise trainee teachers and teaching staff on how to best address specific topics at their school. These train-the-trainer seminars for disseminators are another important feature of our project for schools.

*6. What are the teams like that staff the school projects?*

*Hannes Warcup:* Our teams are composed of 2-3 of our volunteer staff; they hold their workshops for students only, without school teachers present. Our instructors are specially trained and up to 27 years of age; they take a peer-to-peer approach to their work in social service institutions and schools. In-depth knowledge of and experience with “queer” issues are further qualifications they all bring to the task. Their didactic approach will be defined by autobiographical modules and interactive methods. Most of the instructors not long ago were still students themselves and therefore will be still very familiar with the typical issues students face.

*7. Which aspects do you cover in your workshops in schools?*

*Hannes Warcup:* The issues to be covered in the workshops are discussed and agreed upon in advance with the class teachers. Special focus may be on various aspects of sex education, on what it means to be “gay” or “lesbian”, etc.; very topical at the moment also the question of “trans\*”identity.

*8. What is the duration of your seminars in schools typically?*

*Hannes Warcup:* As a rule, a seminar unit will be 90 minutes; the duration can, however, be adapted according to specific requirements or on demand.

*9. How central are issues related to „Coming Out“ in your seminars and programs?*

*Hannes Warcup:* Coming Out and related experiences with will often feature in our seminars, as this

will invariably be a part of every volunteer instructor's personal biography. During the workshop, however, participants are discouraged from making any revelations relating to themselves, i.e. in the meaning of a Coming Out. A School or a classroom community by definition constitutes a community the individual is more or less forced into, its composition not a matter of choice for its members, and therefore may not reliably offer a protected space. On the other hand, it sometimes happens that students ask for the contact details of "DIVERSITY", in order to get in touch with us again later and in a different context.

*10. From your experience with the typical microcosm of a school, can you define which structures and attitudes constitute an obstacle to, and which will promote a positive Coming-out-process for students?*

*Hannes Warcup:* From our perspective, the issue needs to be tackled ideally on as great a multitude of levels and from as many angles and in as many areas as possible, especially in schools. Textbooks and the like need to be amended to include more content and imagery related to LGBT life. Curricula need to be complemented to feature more diverse and varied views portraying other than only the heteronormative. To this end, it will be necessary to further empower and train teachers so they will feel better prepared for and in control of related issues in the classroom. Very often they will need to be further encouraged to introduce the subject in their classroom, and more informed, in order to better understand the individual student's attitudes. The ideal approach will be well-balanced and non-judgmental, and these classes exempt from grading.

A positive, respectful and caring atmosphere at school promotes and facilitates not only Coming-Out-processes, it also promotes acceptance without exception, of diversity and nondiscrimination regarding varying behaviours and all life-styles in general. School policies are to define disrespectful behaviour, homophobia und discrimination as clearly unacceptable. Standing up for one's beliefs and protecting each other from abuse at the same time is to be promoted as cardinal policy principle. A gender-neutral language policy will further contribute to a positive atmosphere of mutual appreciation. An official counsellor should be appointed at the school (school social worker, teacher-advisor), available for discussing any questions and concerns. Also a low-threshold access to information on support and advice regarding LGBT issues should be available.

If such policies are propagated and practiced at school, this will reinforce the self-confidence of all the individuals involved and their psychological health. It is first and foremost a responsibility of a school's management to ensure, maintain and develop such an environment und and thus recognize and remove any possible obstacles early.

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