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Homophobic bullying in schools: Young people speak out



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On 11 August 2008, the youth-led charity Independent Academic Research Studies (IARS) releases the findings of a one year research project which provides new data on what young people think about homophobic bullying in schools. The study was carried out by a group of young researchers and included interviews and questionnaires with 70 other young people who had experience homophobic bullying.

Tony Shepherd, the Chief Executive of Safer London Foundation said: “Much has been said about homophobic bullying ... However, little effort has been made to find out what young people think about such bullying and what changes they would like to see to address the issue. The findings of this timely youth-led study illustrate the impact youth empowerment can have on young people through human rights education and volunteering as well as how values such as dignity and respect can be introduced into schools to address homophobia and bullying”.

According to the report, homophobic bullying is a common phenomenon for all young people and not just for those who are gay or lesbian. The impact can vary from dropping out of school to causing self-harm or harm to others. At the same time, only a few schools acknowledge the problem’s very existence.

Through pilots, the young researchers provide human rights based models that can be adopted by schools to set up practicable solutions to the problem.

Dr. Theo Gavrielides, Director of IARS said: “The experience and realisation of being gay is particularly difficult for young people. We know that only a handful of schools have developed mechanisms to tackle this problem and this is mainly because they won’t accept that they have it. Rarely you will see a proactive approach to homophobia as there is anxiety by certain groups that if children and young people are taught about gay people they will become gay themselves. Therefore, a balanced approach to the problem needs to be identified. One that welcomes differences and at the same time respects the rights of others. The framework of human rights, although significantly misunderstood by the media and the public, can provide the language to negotiate the solutions that are needed to tackle homophobia in schools”.

The study forms part of IARS’ 3 year Youth Empowerment Project funded by V through which 150 young people will be empowered to influence policy and practices that affect them. For more information contact T.Gavrielides@iars.org.uk , 020 7067 1255, 07850523336

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Notes to Editors

* Independent Academic Research Studies (IARS) is a youth-led think-tank that was set up in 2001 to empower and give voice to young people to influence policy and practices that affect them and through their work to support their peers and youth organisations and groups in achieving community cohesion, fighting crime and promoting equality, human rights and restorative justice. www.iars.org.uk

** The Safer London Foundation (SLF) is a registered Charity and has been established with support from the Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA), Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), Rentokil-Initial, Atos Origin and KPMG. The Foundation is the new charitable arm of the MPS and whilst associated with the Service it remains completely independent and autonomous. <http://www.saferlondonfoundation.org>

*** V is the independent charity championing youth volunteering in England. www.wearev.com