

RESEARCH REPORT

# An inclusive approach to parenting

Exploring the intersection of care, career and sexual orientation



2021



## About Grace Papers

Our vision is for a world in which people of all genders are equally responsible for the most important decisions made – in the home and in the workplace.

We are fierce advocates for gender equality and human rights, and work to advance these causes through practical support, consulting and research.

We want to build a future where workplace structures and systems are built on inclusiveness and flexibility for all people.

Everything we do is seen through an intersectional framework and is grounded in research and evidence. We want to know what works, so we can help workplaces do more of it.

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## Foreword

It has been a pleasure to support the work of Grace Papers in the compilation of this document.

Pride in Diversity has a ten-year history of supporting Australian employers in all aspects of LGBTQ inclusion. As part of ACON, we are surrounded by immense subject matter expertise, researchers, policy writers, advocates with the heart of everything we do being the health and wellbeing of the LGBTQ community. Critical to this is the health and wellbeing of Australian LGBTQ families.

This is an important document that outlines the need for organisations to be more inclusive in their policies, the need for leaders to be aware and informed and the need for all of us to respect individuals for who they are and importantly, to celebrate the diversity within our workplaces, our homes and our communities.

This paper encourages the conversation which will be a starting point for many couples, their managers and their HR representatives.

I would like to thank Prue Gilbert, CEO of Grace Papers for her vision and commitment in developing this piece of work and from our team, Jess Meyers, Jack Meehan and Mark Latchford for working alongside Prue and her team to jointly deliver a paper that will truly be welcomed by so many people within our community and our workforce.

### Dawn Hough

Director  
ACON's Pride  
Inclusion programs



## Introduction - Freedom, human rights & belonging

Former Prime Minister of Iceland Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir said, "It is absolutely imperative that every human being's freedom and human rights are respected, all over the world." Never is this more relevant than in the context of family. It is a universal truth that there is no single experience of family. Whereas one child will have a household full of noisy siblings and a loving extended family, a friend will be raised by a devoted single parent. Whereas one family celebrates a marriage of similar culture and country, another embraces a partnership of difference in race and same sexual identity. And therein lies the beauty of family - its complexity and its diversity.

While plenty of research explores how the richness of family life impacts our working lives, little has been done to understand the experiences of families that do not fit into nuclear family stereotypes and transcend societal norms. In particular, families identifying as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ+), and how they experience the intersection of their working lives and family lives.

### A case for belonging

**'A sense of belonging and connection is missing for same-sex attracted women in the workplace. The slow and cumulative effect of day-to-day comments and unconscious bias impacts their confidence and willingness to be authentic in the workplace.'** (Where are all the Women; PWC and Pride in Diversity, August 2018)

At Grace Papers, we are committed to building a future where workplace cultures, structures and systems empower employees to thrive and feel like they belong. We have a vision for a world where parents can realise their full professional and personal potential, without experiencing discrimination, while also creating a world where work is compatible with the modern lives of families.

We know that belonging is a fundamental, emotional need for human beings. And an absence of belonging, of 'unbelonging', contributes to anxiety, stress and physical pain. Creating a space for employees to belong is not just the right thing to do - it makes good business sense. People who feel they belong are six times more likely to be highly engaged (Why Belonging is Important at Work: Employee Engagement and Diversity; Glint, April 2020) and workplaces that foster belonging experience a 56% reduction in turnover. (The Business Case for Investing in Workplace Belonging; Better Up, November 2019)

Unfortunately, we know that not everyone works in an organisation that fosters safe and inclusive practices.

Subtle and overt biases can get in the way of belonging and the statistics reveal that:

- **49% of women and 25% of men experience workplace discrimination during their parental leave journey.** (Supporting Working Parents: Pregnancy and Return to Work National Review; Australian Human Rights Commission, July 2015)
- **29% believe being same-sex attracted inhibits their ability to progress their career, whilst 51% believe that their gender is an inhibitor** (Where are all the Women; PWC and Pride in Diversity, August 2018)

Through our coaching we have been exposed to the unique lived experience of individuals navigating systems that privilege some over others. In sharing these experiences, they have opened our eyes not only to how our identities intersect, but how the intersection of identity plays out in the workplace - from power and promotions, to in-groups and out-groups, to bias and discrimination. So often, it is minorities who experience the greatest discrimination. For the purposes of this research, it is relevant to note that 25% of female same-sex couples and 4.5% of male same-sex couples have children, compared to almost 55% of opposite sex couples. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016)

To help close the knowledge gap in this space, Grace Papers partnered with Pride in Diversity to conduct research - led by Grace Papers resident D&I thought leader, Kristy Macfarlane - to better understand the needs and experiences of LGBTQ+ parents.

The study, titled *An Inclusive Approach to Parenting*, was designed to ensure organisations' policies, practices and programs were inclusive of all family situations. The road to inclusion requires deliberate and intentional action before all employees feel like they can contribute, belong and thrive.

We are delighted to share the insights from this research and the emerging recommendations in this report.



**Prue Gilbert (she/her)**  
CEO  
Grace Papers



**Kristy Macfarlane (she/her)**  
Head of Diversity & Inclusion  
Grace Papers

## Research snapshot

There are many factors that influence our ability to thrive at work and at home, but being able to fully express ourselves, and feel like we belong, is crucial. Through a comprehensive survey and one-on-one interviews, more than 545 people - including 39% identifying as LGBTQ+ - participated in this research which set out to help us answer the following:

1. Are workplace parental leave policies inclusive of all family structures?
2. How can workplace practice be improved to better support all family structures?
3. What are the barriers to an inclusive parenting experience for all people?
4. How does bias or discrimination impact rainbow families in the workplace?

Through the interviews and survey we learned much about workplace policies, practices and language that fostered inclusion, and participants nominated key improvements to the employee experience. But the findings also revealed an 'everyday bias' in our workplaces towards employees navigating the intersection of sexual identity, parenthood and career.

Five key themes emerged from our research, which we will explore in further detail throughout this report.

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To magnify the impact of workplace inclusion efforts it is important that we are mindful of intersectionality. This research does exactly that for the intersection of care, career and sexual orientation. The report provides a deep understanding of how we can all ensure rainbow families have a strong sense of belonging, both in the workplace and in the community.”

**Rachel Mead (she/her)**  
Head of Diversity & Inclusion,  
Woolworths Group Limited

They include:

1. Policies, processes and programs must contain explicit statements of inclusion
2. LGBTQ+ parents experience 'everyday bias' through inappropriate questions from their peers
3. Showcase LGBTQ+ role models
4. Employee network groups foster belonging
5. Public displays of inclusion from leaders are essential to creating the psychological safety for employees to be "out" at work

It is important to note that there was a skew towards heterosexual respondents in the survey. The survey was intentionally opened up to gain perspectives from all people, as awareness is the first step towards an empowered culture. If those who don't identify as LGBTQ+ aren't aware of whether their policy is inclusive, for example, it can reinforce unconscious biases and assumptions about rainbow families.

### Recommendation: A systemic approach to inclusive parenting

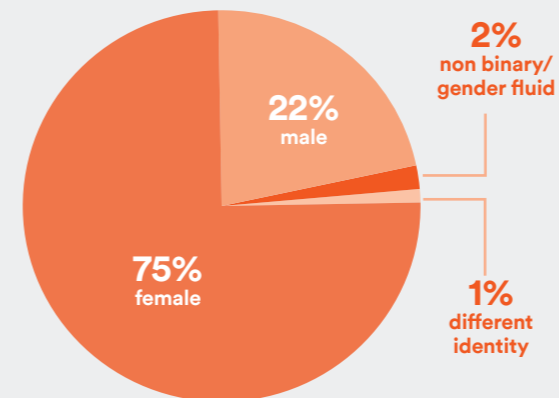
Through greater awareness of the lived experience of participants and a clear vision for inclusive parenting, we can reveal practical actions workplaces can take towards inclusion of all family structures and all forms of parenting, regardless of gender or gender identity: A systemic approach to inclusive parenting.



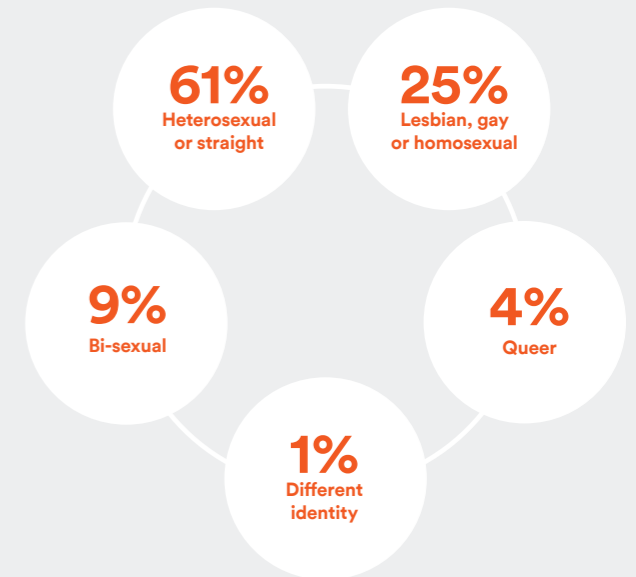
## Participation

Of the **545** participants surveyed...

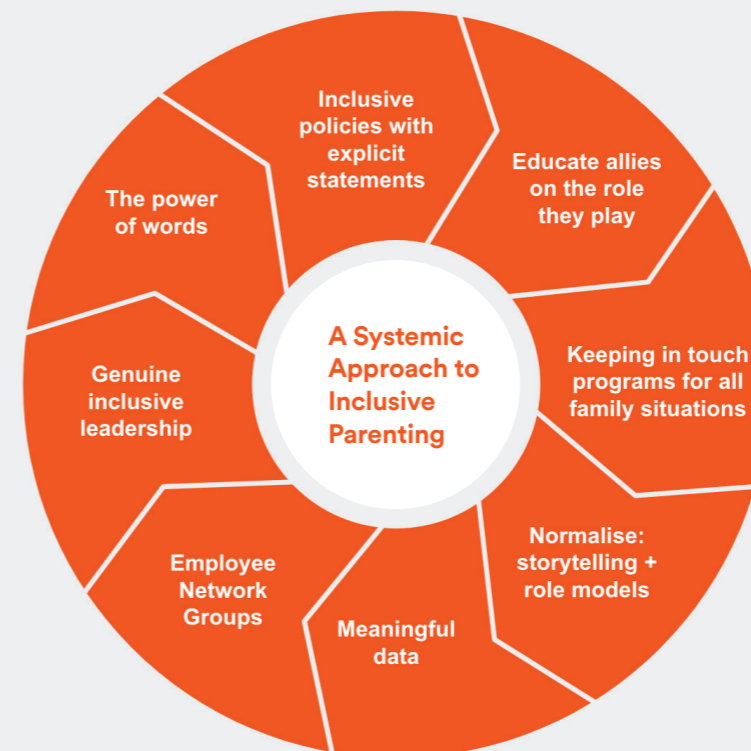
### Breakdown of gender identity:



### Breakdown of sexual identity:



### A systemic approach to inclusive parenting



## INSIGHT 1

### Policies, processes and programs must contain explicit statements of inclusion

When it comes to understanding their rights and entitlements at work, an employees' first point of call is generally their company's policy. And the same applies to People Leaders. Yet there appears to be a widespread lack of awareness on whether policies are inclusive of all family structures, genders and forms of parenting.

The data shows us:

- **28% of participants are unsure of whether their current workplace parental leave policy is inclusive and accessible to all people, regardless of an employee's gender or gender identity.**
- **47% of participants are unsure of whether their workplace parental leave policy specifically states that it is inclusive of all family types, including LGBTQ+ families.**
- **34% of participants are unsure of whether their current workplace parental leave policy includes all forms of parenting, including surrogacy, adoption, foster arrangements and single parenting.**

It begs the question - is this lack of awareness a signal of a self-fulfilling bias, showing that organisations are blissfully unaware? Or in other words, unconsciously incompetent?

This policy space is where many organisations can become unknowingly unstuck and, even in teams where managers overtly support inclusion, it is imperative that policies are outlined effectively so all team members know their entitlements - without having to ask. In our research, some disheartening statistics were revealed:

- **Just 62% of participants say that their current workplace's parental leave policy is inclusive and accessible to all people, regardless of an employee's gender or gender identity.**
- **Only 57% of participants say that their current workplace's parental leave policy includes all forms of parenting, including surrogacy, adoption, foster arrangements and single parenting.**

- **Just 35% of participants say that their workplace's parental leave policy specifically states that it is inclusive of all family types, including LGBTQ+ families.**
- **Only 16% of participants say that their current parental leave policy or associated carers leave policy allows for time to attend to IVF appointments as either the gestational parent or the partner. 23% of participants said it definitely did not, and 61% of participants were unsure.**

Currently, leave for IVF treatment is not a legitimate use of personal leave under the Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth), as women undergoing treatment are neither 'ill' nor 'injured'. As a result, there is significant uncertainty regarding the use of Personal Leave by women undergoing IVF - during what is, almost universally, a physically and emotionally draining experience, regardless of their family dynamic. With the added stress of not knowing whether a workplace will support time off for appointments, this can become a huge barrier to engagement and inclusion.

### Recommendation

Organisational policies and programs should incorporate explicit statements recognising their application to all family situations and all forms of parenting. To create inclusive policies that will be used by those who need them, we recommend leaders consult with employees to understand their lived experience.

Below is an example of an inclusive policy:

**"Our Parental Leave Policy reflects the diversity of families within XX, and provides a range of support for employees who are pregnant and expecting a child, adopting or permanently fostering a child/children, or who are expecting a child via surrogate birth. All parents at XX, including diverse and same gender parents, are covered by this policy."**

It is also important to be specific about access to reproductive leave for IVF and associated treatments. For example:

**"Reproductive Leave: Eligible employees may access up to 5 days leave a year, or 10 half days for IVF, endometriosis, serious menstrual pain, vasectomies, symptoms or treatments linked to menopause, polycystic ovarian syndrome, sperm and egg donations or gender reassignment."**

## Is your policy inclusive?

Is your current workplace parental leave policy inclusive and accessible to all people, regardless of an employee's gender or gender identity?

**62% YES**

Does your current workplace parental leave policy include all forms of parenting, including surrogacy, adoption, foster arrangements and single parenting?

**57% YES**

Does your workplace parental leave policy specifically state that it is inclusive of all family types, including LGBTQ+ families?

**35% YES**

Does your current parental leave policy or associated carers leave policy, allow for time to attend to IVF appointments as either the carrier or the partner:

**16% YES**

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**"Survey data tells us LGBTIQ+ people will naturally edit themselves out of policies, network groups or workplace benefits and entitlements when it's not explicitly stated that they are included. So, it's important that organisations provide explicit statements on inclusion for people of diverse genders, sexes and sexualities within all policies"**

**Dyllyn Tierney (she/her)**

Origin



## INSIGHT 2

### LGBTQ+ parents experience 'everyday bias' through inappropriate questions from their peers

While attitudes towards same-sex parents have come a long way, there is a fine line between being respectfully curious and being intrusive, judgemental or biased. The research has revealed that toddler tantrums aren't the only test of patience same-sex parents have to endure. The relentless comments and queries they are bombarded with only lead to a bigger question: are people asking questions to enrich their understanding, or are people being sticky beaks? Being aware of language and its impact is not just a policy consideration. It's a matter of educating employees around inclusive actions, inclusive language, and inclusive decisions.

The data shows us:

- **54% of participants say that as a parent with a diverse expression of sexuality or gender, they get asked a lot of questions about labels.**
- **32% of participants say that they are asked questions that they deem inappropriate or insensitive in relation to being from a rainbow family.**
- **40% of participants say that these questions most commonly relate to conception.**

These are just some of the questions and comments that plague LGBTQ+ parents in the workforce, gleaned from participants' responses:

- **"I'm just curious. Who is the dad?"**
- **"What role do you each play?"**
- **"Why aren't you carrying this one? Didn't your partner carry the last one?"**

- **"I'm often asked who carried my children, which is another way of asking who the 'real' parent is."**
- **"Not being seen as a 'real parent' is the main bias."**
- **"As the non birth mother, and being over the age of 50, with white hair, people assume I'm our two year olds' grandmother. It makes their head explode when our daughter calls me Mummy."**

How can we ensure individuals are prepared and equipped to answer these questions in a way that educates and normalises, while not invading their privacy? And more importantly, how can we ensure leaders are committed to creating safe spaces built on a foundation of understanding and awareness, so questions are never invasive, but rather, spark an authentic conversation?

### Recommendation

To create safe spaces built on a foundation of understanding and awareness, organisations must encourage employees to become champions of diversity and inclusion by participating in ally training.

An ally is a straight (heterosexual) advocate for LGBTQ+ workplace inclusion – a supporter, a friend, a person who wants to see change and is prepared to do their part to bring change forward. Increasing allies in the workplace not only improves awareness, understanding and respect for LGBTQ+ employees, but encourages staff to be part of the inclusion solution.

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**"In the workplace, my advice would be, if you're going to ask a question, would you be comfortable asking someone in a 'traditional' relationship questions of the same nature or intimacy?"**

**Melanie Durante (she/her)**  
Woolworths



### INSIGHT 3

#### Showcase LGBTQ+ role models

We've heard it before in so many different circumstances, and the sentiment continues to ring true: we can't be what we can't see. As Where Are All The Women stated, "Role models are critical to helping same-sex attracted women build a sense of belonging and vision for the future. The concept of a role model can be re-imagined to make it easier for women to understand how they can act as role models whilst being true to themselves and authentic."

We know that role models are critical in helping same-sex attracted employees build a sense of belonging. However, our research revealed that 69% of parents with a diverse sexuality and/or gender, said they did not have any visible role models within their organisation who could offer advice and share their experiences.

#### Recommendation

To increase the sense of belonging among same-sex attracted employees, organisations should focus on increasing the visibility of role models across a range of backgrounds. We recommend organisations focus on storytelling which celebrates role models from a range of diverse backgrounds.



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**“I really wish that all Australians would embrace proper sexuality and human relationship programs early on, that allow for proper conversations that do not encourage shame, guilt or secrecy. We would prevent a lot of mental health issues in adults.”**

**Paul P Winbanks (he/him)**  
Origin Energy

### INSIGHT 4

#### Employee network groups foster belonging

A sense of belonging, that fundamental human need we all have to be accepted by members of a group, can also be fostered through an active and engaged Employee Network Group. However, our research reveals just 28% of participants have access to an Employee Network Group for parents, and of those that do, just 60% say that the Employee Network Group is visibly supportive of all families.

Employee Network Groups, which Catalyst defines as “voluntary, employee-led groups that foster a diverse, inclusive workplace aligned with organizational mission, values, goals, business practices, and objective,” are important because of their shared purpose in bringing employees together.

While they may be started by employees, what is critical to the success of Employee Network Groups is that they are sponsored by the organisation. When they play a part in the organisation's inclusion strategy, this ensures they remain a sustainable solution and don't become a burden on employees to manage in addition to their professional roles. From supporting the onboarding experience for new employees, to making sure employees have an opportunity to be heard, valued and engaged, Employee Network Groups are a brilliant way to drive belonging.

Once they are established it is important to have employee network groups cross collaborate (with other Employee Networks in the organisation) to build awareness of the intersection of multiple identities and band together to dismantle barriers and network.

#### Recommendation

To increase a sense of belonging among same-sex attracted employees, organisations should establish, develop and grow Employee Network Groups specifically for LGBTQ+ employees and parents/families. In addition to this, organisations should ensure Employee Network Group strategies include cross collaboration - through events and education sessions - to recognise intersectionality and further enable belonging.

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**“Intersectionality is really important. At PwC, we have a great Families Network and a great LGBTQ+ Network. They've done such good work in silos, so now it's time to bring these together and collaborate to show that a family is a family.”**

**Laura Mullan (she/her)**  
PwC



## INSIGHT 5

### Public displays of inclusion by leaders are essential in creating the psychological safety for employees to be “out” at work.

The research was loud and clear that inclusive cultures begin with leadership. For an inclusive culture to thrive, leaders must acknowledge their responsibility in setting the right tone, role modeling respect, and genuinely valuing diversity through their actions, symbols and words.

Coming “out” at work and announcing your pregnancy are two incredibly confronting experiences. In both circumstances, employees experience their personal and private lives colliding in the most public of ways. It is for this reason that psychological safety, fostered by leaders, is critical. A psychologically safe workplace is one where people are not full of fear, and not trying to cover their tracks to avoid being embarrassed or punished.

Concerningly, our research revealed that 12% of participants came “out” at work when announcing they were pregnant. The situation becomes increasingly complex for employees who are not carrying their child and are forced to explain their situation in order to access leave.

Concealing personal information compromises employee wellbeing and is reflective of a culture likely to be hostile to both LGBTQ+ and expectant parents. Not feeling safe and comfortable to be “out” at work doesn’t just impact the employee: the workplace suffers too. Research shows those who are “out” to everyone outperform those who are not.

Each year Pride in Diversity publishes the Australian Workplaces Equality Index, the definitive national benchmark on LGBTQ+ workplace inclusion. The AWEI Employee Survey, which accompanies the Australian Workplace Equality Index every year, is Australia’s richest source of annual and local data that focuses on both LGBTQ+ inclusion initiatives and the impact of these initiatives on employees, regardless of how they identify. The data from the 2020 survey continues to show that those who are “out” to all experience better health and wellbeing outcomes than those who are not. And in terms of performance and productivity, those who were “out” to everyone outperformed those who were not.

Diversity Council of Australia: Out at Work, From Prejudice to Pride found that LGBTQ+ employees who are not “out” to everyone at work are:

- **Twice as likely to feel down compared to employees who are “out” to everyone at work.**
- **45% less likely to be satisfied with their job.**

Secondly, being “out” drives performance. LGBTQ+ employees who are “out” to everyone at work are:

- **50% more likely to innovate than workers who are not “out” to everyone.**
- **35% more likely to work highly effectively in their team.**
- **28% more likely to provide excellent customer/client service.**

### Recommendation

To improve the health, wellbeing, performance, and general safety of LGBTQ+ employees, organisations must provide inclusive leadership training that improves leadership literacy and gives leaders the necessary skills to foster psychological safety. In addition to this, organisations must also ensure parental leave policies, processes and programs are explicitly inclusive of all families.

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“When it comes to rainbow families, the more visibility, the better as it normalises our experience. Plus, seeing same-sex attracted women being successful in being their whole selves at work is really reassuring, and their confidence is inspiring. The more we know about our leaders, the more humanised they are. And this is even more important for people undertaking a challenging - or different to conventional - experience.

Leaders and role models are so important. I’m very proud to be open about my sexuality and my rainbow family at work. Work is such an important part of our identities, and we want to bring our whole selves to work every day. We’re happy for people to see us as role models who are supported by our workplaces.”

**Amanda Lawrence (she/her)**  
Resilience NSW



## Conclusion

The insights and recommendations from this report reveal a roadmap towards inclusion through deliberate and intentional action. This research also reinforced the need to understand experiences of workplace inclusion through meaningful data, because what is measured matters. Whether it be measuring attitudes through the engagement survey or running a separate inclusion benchmark, having the data, tracking trends and changes, and holding leaders to account will ensure workplaces continue to evolve to better reflect the social expectations that drive inclusion for all employees.

By adopting the recommendations, all workplaces can build cultures in which their employees navigating the intersection of sexuality, career and parenthood feel like they can contribute, belong and thrive.

We encourage organisations and leaders to:

- Create inclusive policies that incorporate explicit statements, leaving nothing to chance or interpretation**
- Educate employees to become allies, encouraging them to play an active role in changing the workplace culture and fostering inclusion**

- Provide Parental leave and Keeping In Touch programs that are explicitly inclusive of rainbow families**
- Normalise LGBTQ+ parenting through storytelling that also showcases role models**
- Collect and analyse meaningful data to foster data driven decision making**
- Establish, develop and grow Employee Network Groups that collaborate to amplify a sense of belonging where intersects of identity occur**
- Improve leadership capability through inclusive leadership training**

For further support and advice, pertaining to LGBTQ+ inclusion, become a member of Pride In Diversity [prideinclusionprograms.com.au](http://prideinclusionprograms.com.au) to obtain year long access.

For leadership training and support for your new and expectant parents, reach out to Grace Papers [gracepapers.com.au](http://gracepapers.com.au).

## Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands where we work, live, and care. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

We celebrate the stories, culture and traditions of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. We respect the notion of 'dadirri' (deep listening), which is vital as we work toward gender equality for all peoples.

We would like to acknowledge and thank those who have contributed to this report including individuals from Resilience NSW, PWC, Woolworths and Origin Energy.



## Notes about this research

1. The majority of respondents to this survey were women. We know that only 4.5% of men in same-gender relationships are parents (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). These factors are symbolic of the reality that men face more significant barriers to becoming parents. Whether this is due to the complexity and costs of surrogacy, or the stigma and societal expectations around women being natural carers for young children, this is an important consideration for these findings.
2. We acknowledge that there are many diverse sexual orientations and genders. In the research, we incorporated a + on the LGBTQ+ acronym, to encapsulate all identifying orientations and genders.
3. Due to the small number of responses from people who are non-binary or another gender identity other than man or woman, there was not enough data to draw statistically significant conclusions for non-binary parents in this report. Over time, Grace Papers intends to expand the research to better understand gender diversity beyond the binary of man and woman as it relates to inclusive parenting.
4. Grace Papers is committed to expanding our research to consult with people that have an intersex variation, and how it relates to parenting policy, programs and practice. It is also important to note that Pride in Diversity specialises in LGBTQ inclusion in the workplace – however it is not the peak body in intersex inclusion in the workplace. PID have signed the Darlington Statement, which affirms their position as an ally to the intersex community, and they defer all work on intersex inclusion to intersex-led bodies such as Intersex Human Rights Australia (IHRA) or Intersex Peer Support Australia (IPSA).



## Addendum

In her podcast, *Unlocking Us*, Brené Brown asks whether it is more powerful to be able to run a multivariate analysis or whether it is equally as powerful to be able to listen to and collect with empathy stories from people and find themes and patterns that help us change the world. She concludes that stories are just data with a soul. So in bringing the data we've shared in this report to life, we are also delighted to be able to share with you a selection of the stories from participants to add soul and, hopefully, empathy to your insights. We thank each of the participants for so generously sharing their experiences with all of us.

## CASE STUDY 1

### Melanie Durante

"In the workplace, my advice would be, if you're going to ask a question, would you be comfortable asking someone in a 'traditional' relationship questions of the same nature or intimacy?"

Melanie Durante (she/her), National Logistics Manager at Woolworths Group, considers herself incredibly lucky that her company is committed to nurturing an inclusive workplace. "I have always felt comfortable to 'bring my whole self' to work," she says. Never is this more important for an employee than when a pregnancy is involved.

"I had a lot of nerves in the lead up to my conversation with my manager," Melanie says. "I'm very passionate about and fulfilled by my career and the value that I bring to my work, so I was nervous that my pregnancy may reflect otherwise upon me, as it's not like the pregnancy was unplanned - our circumstances require it to be!"

With nerves and heightened emotions at play, it was invaluable that Melanie was aware of her rights. "Woolworths Group have a good repository of team member rights and policy entitlements on their team portal," Melanie says. "So, I was confident, given the culture, that the policy would cover my situation. There was also an explicit inclusive statement in the policy with regard to same gender relationships, so I felt supported." And she was right. "My manager warmly received the news and was really happy for me and my family!"

As she prepares for her upcoming parental leave, Melanie says, "It's been wonderful to see how supportive and proactive my manager and the wider business has been about my keeping in touch plan. They really respect my desire to stay engaged."

This is baby number two for Melanie and her partner Erika, who also have a 5-year-old-daughter, Stella. In hearing her news, Melanie considers herself fortunate that her workplace has been accepting and curious, rather than intrusive. "Any questions have come from a place of curiosity rather than anything else," Melanie says.

Melanie is acutely aware that her positive experience at Woolworths sadly may not yet be a common one across Australian workplaces.

"I am fortunate enough to work for an inclusive workplace, with fantastic programs on diversity and inclusion," she says. "Whilst all workplaces should have their policies extend to those in a same gender relationship to avoid discrimination, it's the programs of a workplace that set the tone and its

microcosm's societal fabric.

To start with, all policies should have explicit statements to show that same gender relationships are included, it brings peace of mind to those it applies to and reiterates wider awareness that families come in different forms."

Regardless of the form it takes, the challenges of working parents are universal. "Any working parent has challenges in balancing career and care. Getting the balance right daily is an impossible feat," says Melanie. "My partner and I both work full time and are passionate about our careers and the work we do. I take great pride in the fact that Stella will grow up with these influences of a strong work ethic around her."

Melanie also reiterates the importance of having an equal partnership. She says, "We both respect each other's careers and take turns in balancing career and care. As we don't have 'traditional' roles at home, we escape the outdated stereotype of having one main caregiver whilst the other focuses and prioritises their career."

As for the day-to-day elements of life, Melanie and Erika prioritise based on work commitments and calendars. "Sometimes it's a 'divide and conquer' approach, other times one of us may have a pressing deadline with work so the other will jump in to take the lead on the home front that evening," she says. "Given our busy schedules, outside of work we fiercely protect the family time we do have together and prioritise it above everything else."

When asked what Melanie would do to help rainbow families of the future, she says, "I am fortunate enough to work in an inclusive workplace, but many others aren't as fortunate. We need all workplaces across Australia to advance their diversity and inclusion agenda to ensure that all people are encouraged to bring their 'whole selves' to work. To fully show up, engage and thrive."



## CASE STUDY 2

### Paul P Winbanks

When it comes to being an advocate and role model for inclusivity, we'd be hard pressed to find one more qualified than Paul Winbanks (he/him). As a Change Manager at Origin Energy, Paul has lived and breathed what he preaches for a lifetime.

"We always welcomed everyone into our home regardless of colour, creed or rainbow flag colour. It was always about respect," Paul says. Having been happily married for 24 years until his wife died of cancer, Paul and his late wife were champions of inclusivity. "We purposely sent our son to an LGBTQI+ friendly school because we wanted our values reflected in his schooling every day," he said.

Following the passing of Paul's wife, and after years of counselling, Paul discovered that he was bisexual. After dating both genders for a period of time, Paul then met his current, male partner. "I'm a bisexual, cisgender male and I always openly introduce myself as 'batting for both teams,' even in the workplace," Paul says.

Paul considers himself very lucky that his leaders have allowed him to be open about his sexuality and to reference his partner without fear or prejudice. But as his partner has not experienced the same respect, he knows that it isn't always smooth sailing. Particularly in the workforce, Paul says not to make assumptions. "Bi-erasure is very challenging," he says. "My beautiful relationship with my wife of 24 years should not be erased because people do not understand bisexuality."

Paul also encourages people not to pass judgements on how individuals should identify, or make any gross generalisations, which Paul states are usually garnered from bad movies. For example, 'You're not gay enough.' 'Did you cheat on your wife with a man?' 'Would you go back to women now?' Understandably, Paul says it is always better to ask questions openly and to discuss questions with a genuine desire to understand. Of course, bringing a new partner into his family fold has not been a walk in the park. But Paul's son has supported his new partner after his mother died. "My late wife and I were very open about all topics when my son was young and right through his teenage years," Paul says. "But being a single parent after his mum died was challenging. I set very clear expectations that my new partner could not discipline my son and that my son must be respectful of my new partner.

Neither of them were forced to be friends, just respectful of each other. The school counsellor and I worked together and reiterated with my son, that it would be like a 'family friend' relationship."

This relationship has been a source of joy and pride for Paul and his family. "My son's respectful attitude to my new partner and genuine inclusion of my partner in our family activities has made me proud," he says. "My own father has been very supportive of my new partner too, which models the right behaviour for my son. I particularly enjoy hearing my son and my partner talking respectfully to each other and laughing at their own jokes (usually at my expense) when they don't know I can hear."

As a former Primary School teacher, Paul is well equipped to advise on the types of changes we should be making in society and workplaces. "I really wish that all Australians would embrace proper sexuality and human relationship programs early on, that allow for proper conversations that do not encourage shame, guilt or secrecy. We would prevent a lot of mental health issues in adults," he says. Further, Paul hopes for a future where being gender fluid or non-binary is not secretive or surprising, but accepted and normalised.

In terms of advice for leaders, Paul is also happy to share his expertise, and says it really all comes down to inclusive policies and programs. "So that single parents, married parents, de facto parents, single people who are carers and guardians all get access to the same rights," he says. "Your people will do the right thing by you if they feel they are included, despite their rainbow flag identification."



## CASE STUDY 3

### Dyllyn Tierney

While pregnancy and early parenthood are hardly a walk in the park for anyone, the experience is made immeasurably more challenging for those in the trans community. One who has experienced this firsthand is Dyllyn Tierney (she/her), who underwent gender affirmation in 2017 and recently helped to spearhead an inclusive gender affirmation policy at Origin Energy.

"The idea of being a parent comes with a sense of difficulty as the barriers and journey to become a parent seem overwhelmingly hard," Dyllyn said. "My experience with romantic relationships has been impacted by the fact that I can't produce biological children, which I understand and respect as a lot of people want to have their own biological children, but it still doesn't make it hurt any less."

As challenging as that is, Dyllyn is far from pessimistic. "I have accepted that there are difficult moments I will face along this journey but nothing I can't handle," she said. "I wasn't born in the wrong body; I was born for this experience."

Origin proudly offers paid gender affirmation leave for six weeks (or 12 weeks at half pay), and Dyllyn's experience has paved the way for future Origin Energy employees. "In the last 12 months, I have been part of a project team who has delivered a digital introduction learning program for Origin employees, providing foundational knowledge and awareness to diverse genders, sexes and sexualities," she said. "I also provided subject matter expertise as Origin developed and delivered a robust and supportive guide for anyone affirming their gender at work, providing tools for their managers and colleagues so they feel empowered to support each other. I have also provided digital learning and awareness sessions to support the launch of the Gender Affirming support to engage and educate our people."

Acknowledging that everyone's experience is individual and unique, Dyllyn - who was assigned male at birth - recently

affirmed her gender socially, legally and medically. "It hasn't been easy," she said. "But nothing is easy that requires authenticity and realness. It takes courage, resilience and self-acceptance every day to show up and be yourself."

And while being yourself at work should be a given, it is rarely that simple for those identifying as LGBTQIA+. As a proponent of policy change as a first step toward equality, Dyllyn encourages leaders to ensure explicit statements are included in policy, "Survey data tells us LGBTQIA+ people will naturally edit themselves out of policies, network groups or workplace benefits and entitlements when it's not explicitly stated that they are included," she said. "So, it's important that organisations provide explicit statements on inclusion for people of diverse genders, sexes and sexualities within all policies."

When asked what she would change if she had a magic wand for rainbow families, Dyllyn says, "Removing discrimination, stigma and barriers around adoption and fostering as an LGBTQIA+ parent." She continues, "Providing support and inclusion for LGBTQIA+ individuals who want to become adoptive parents, and to be considered like their heteronormative coupled or singled peers."

And as a final word of advice, Dyllyn says, "Don't be afraid to ask questions about experiences you don't know. We are all on a learning journey. So, enrich yourself by connecting with people of diverse experiences and learn from one another. Trust me, you'll benefit from it more than you realise."

