

# Queer Family

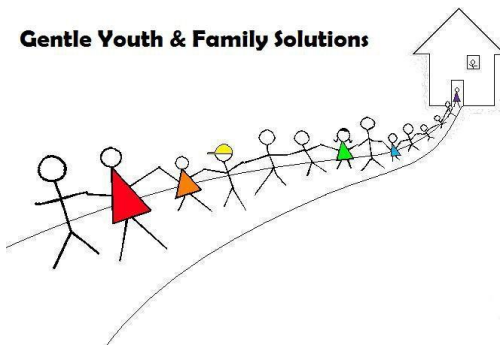
## The first six months

Prepared by Catalyst  
Consultancy & Research  
April 2020

# QUEER FAMILY

## Queer Family

- \* a group of people coming together to form community
- \* synonymous with safety, love, connection, inclusion, support, acceptance, belonging, affirmation & validation



# Queer Family is a project of GYFS

Queer Family is a peer-to-peer project based in the Byron Shire, run under the management of Gentle Youth & Family Solutions.

Queer Family aims to reduce social isolation and improve mental health by creating safe spaces for LGBTQIA+ people and allies in the Northern Rivers to connect and build community.

The project was established in direct response to research conducted at Rainbow Sheddars, held in Mullumbimby in 2019. The results indicated a gap in services for the LGBTQIA+ community in the Byron Shire, and a strong need. Queer Family have since hosted 14 face to face events and 2 online events, with a further 3 planned events cancelled due to Covid-19.

Queer Family has a growing volunteer base, with 23 community members volunteering their time, 10 others volunteering professional services, and 16 workers from external agencies providing in-kind support, to a total of 1,044 hours over 6 months.

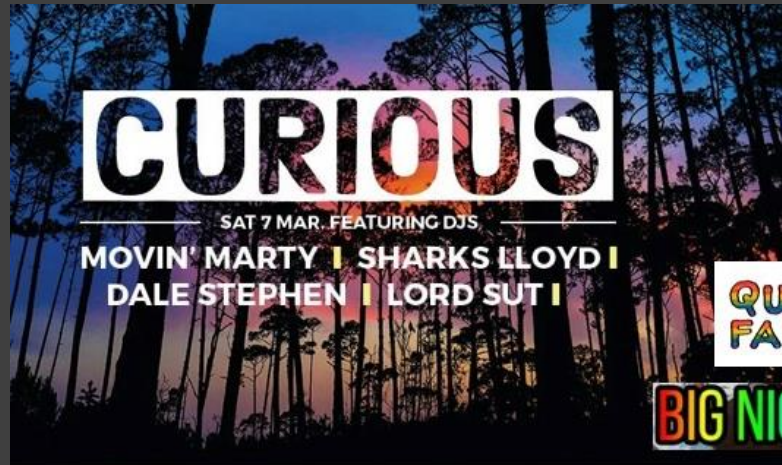
**Aiden Gentle** (they/them) is the Director of **Gentle Youth & Family Solutions**, a social enterprise for vulnerable young people and families. GYFS provide counselling, therapeutic group programs and support for vulnerable communities, as well as clinical supervision, research, training and professional support for other welfare organisations.

Aiden is a **Social Worker, Counsellor, Permaculturalist, Northern Rivers local** and proud member of Queer Family. They have worked and volunteered within the youth, community, justice and welfare sectors in Australia and Norway since 1999. Aiden has particular expertise in the areas of LGBTQIA+ communities, youth, homelessness, AOD and offending.

Aiden has the **lived experience of a 42 year old nonbinary human** who identifies with the terms queer (sexuality and gender) and transgender. They have extensive involvement in their community over the past 22 years, working and volunteering for organisations such as ACON, Tropical Fruits, Transville, Mardi Gras, Bobby Goldsmith Foundation, Gay Games and the Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project. They have also conducted research, presented at conferences, been involved in publications specifically in relation to the LGBTQIA+ community.

Queer Family events saw 216 event attendees, of which 116 were unique individuals

If Queerstories had gone ahead, this number would have been 346 attendees and 219 unique individuals



# Queer family has been highly active in providing support services to the community outside of formal events

Queer Family has helped 276 unique individuals over 6 months

Excluding events, Queer Family

- Provided 894 free occasions of service
- Built relationships with 25 workers in the community sector, across 15 agencies
- Participated in 5 interviews (radio and print/online media) to raise the profile of queer issues and support available in the region

Type of support offered by QF to Queer Family participant	People helped (some repeats)	Unique individuals	Instances of service excluding events
Met at an event face to face at least once	216	116	0
Met with individually due to anxiety issues	2	0	2
Consultations about QF at events	87	0	12
Consultations about QF external to events (face to face)	12	10	12
Supported with accommodation issues	6	3	9
Supported with information and referral re other services	6	4	15
Supported through bush fire issues	3	0	5
Supported with DV issues	1	0	7
Supported with mental health issues	3	0	12
Supported re deaths in family	2	0	10
Supported with legal issues	1	0	8
Support around coming out	5	0	12
Parents / family support	2	2	30
Support to External agency (information, letters of support, referral etc.)	6	5	12
Supported with serious illness in family	1	0	5
Supported through own serious illness (excl mental health)	3	0	25
Supported students with placement / study issues	3	1	4
Support around covid19	7	0	14
Contact via technology (call, sms, fb message, post, email)	160	135	700
Totals	526	276	894



**Research Project**  
Independent audit of Queer  
Family's first six months

# About the research

## Background & method

Research conducted via an online survey amongst people involved with Queer Family

- Email survey
- Invitations posted on QF Facebook page
- Invitations posted on other Northern Rivers community and LGBTQIA+ pages
- Operational statistics obtained from Queer Family

### Topics covered

- Personal identity
- Experiences and health status
- Living situation, employment and income
- Involvement with Queer Family
- Value from Queer Family
- Perceptions of events
- Future intentions and drivers
- Perceptions of Facebook

Research was provided by Catalyst Research pro bono

- Independent assessment of Queer Family's activity for the first six months of operation

## Sample

Fieldwork was conducted in March 2020

- Largely completed prior to the onset of the COVID-19 outbreak in Australia
- However, three planned events were postponed due to health concerns

Feedback was obtained from 80 people involved with QF

- Profile of the sample is outlined below

Self identification	Interviews
LGBTQIA+ community member due to my sexuality	62
LGBTQIA+ community member due to my gender identity	15
Unsure or questioning my sexuality	4
Unsure or questioning my gender	4
Friend of someone who is LGBTQIA+	29
Family member of someone who is LGBTQIA+	12
Worker / Volunteer for the LGBTQIA+ community	7
Interested in supporting the LGBTQIA+ community	25

# Summary of findings

## Queer Family is highly valued in the Northern Rivers community

- It provides community connection, and a safe, supportive environment for a broad range of queer people of all ages
- No other organisation provides the support and community offered by Queer Family in the Byron Shire

## With chronic negative life experiences and high levels of social and economic stress, the queer community is in need of the support offered by Queer Family

- Negative social and physical experiences due to LGBTQIA+ identities are very common in the Byron Shire
- Eight in ten feel invisible, while two thirds feel they have to hide their gender / sexuality and more than half have felt unsafe or afraid
- Nine in ten have suffered a mental health issue at some point, two thirds currently and three in ten seek additional help
- A third lack social support from their family of origin
- One in five live in unstable housing, most of these have been long term
- Almost eight in ten do not have full-time employment and half live in low income households

## Queer family activities are highly valued

- The Facebook page is active and growing and provides significant support in keeping up with LGBTQIA+ news and activity, as well as building and maintaining community connections to people with similar life experiences
- Events are broadly attended by local residents and, with rescheduled events likely to be the most popular so far, appear set to grow in the future
- Perceptions of events are very strong with nine in ten attendees rating events as 'very positive'
- Demand is strong with more than eight in ten intending to participate in future events





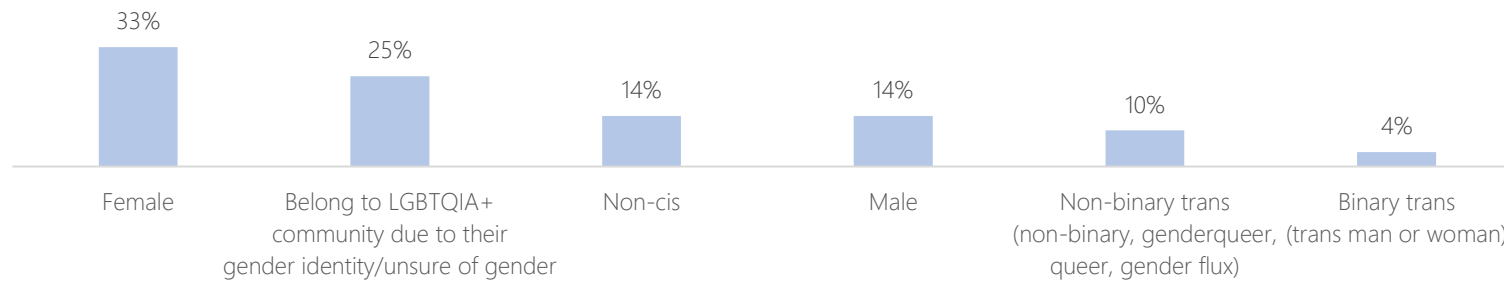
# Research findings

## About the Queer Family community

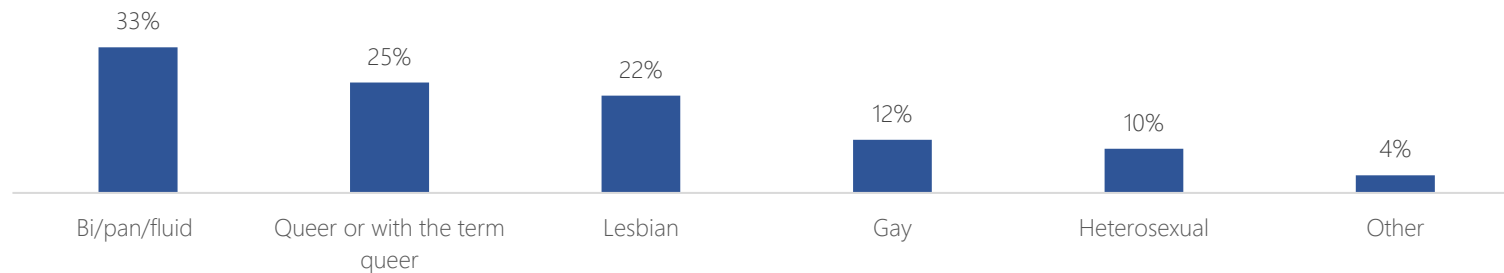


# Queer Family supports a broad range of differently identifying people ranging in age from 16 to 68

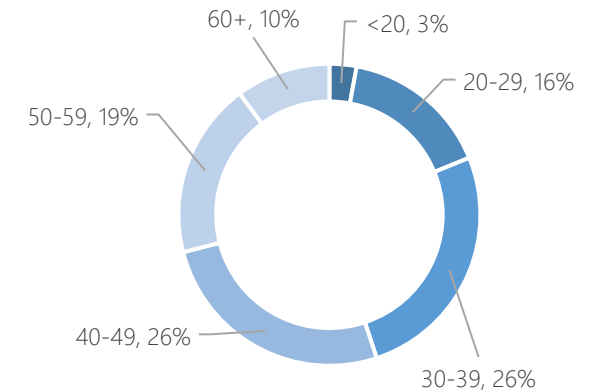
Gender identification



Sexual identification



Age

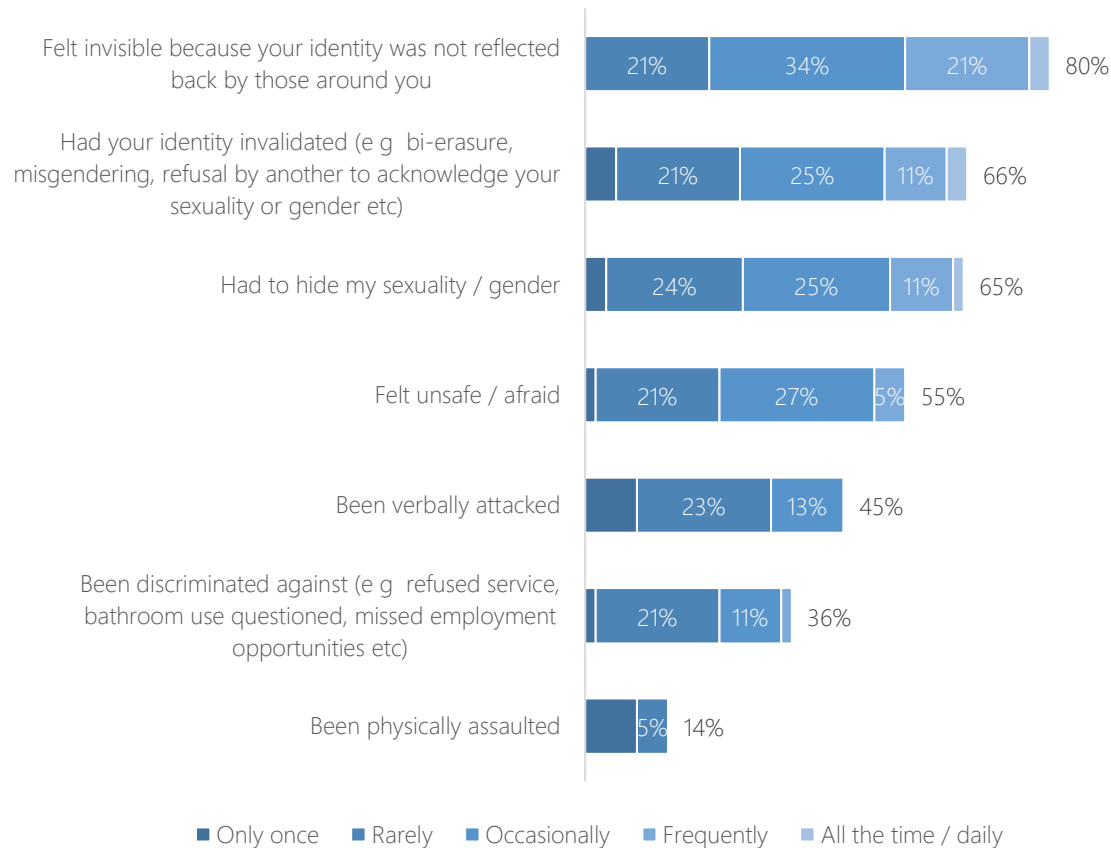


- While the community is skewed towards women it comprises a broad range of different gender identities
- Likewise many different sexualities belong to the community
- QF members come from all age groups

# Negative social and physical experiences are common

Based on 56 queer and questioning QF members

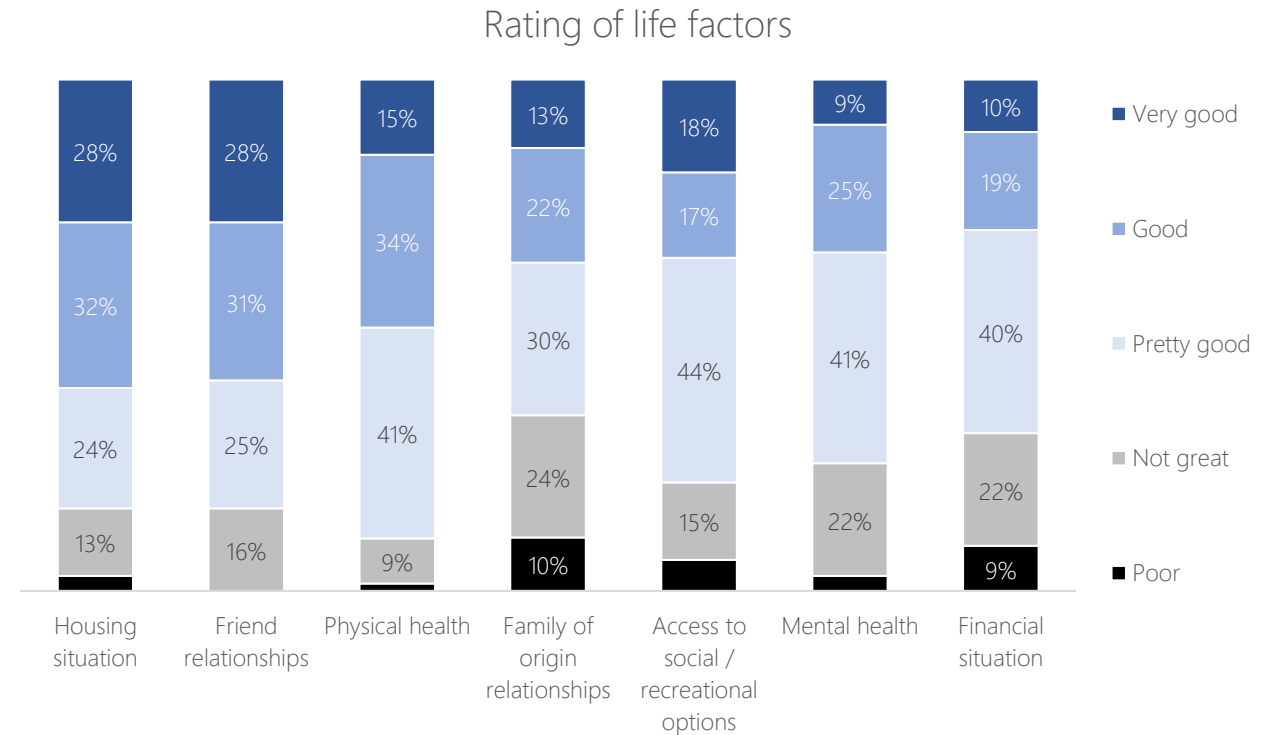
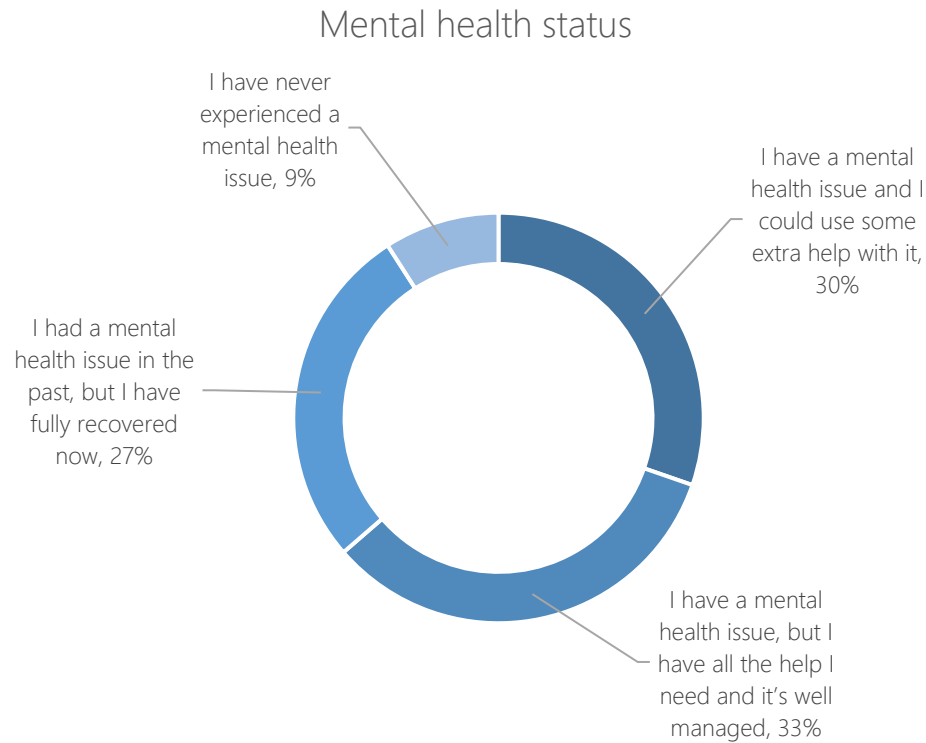
Frequency experienced



Most queer and questioning people have had negative social and physical experiences in the Byron Shire because of their identity

- Eight in ten have felt invisible because their identity is ignored, a quarter frequently feel like this
- Two thirds have had their identity invalidated
- The same proportion have had to hide their identity
- More than half have felt unsafe
- Just under half have been verbally attacked
- One in six have been physically attacked
- Over a third have been discriminated against

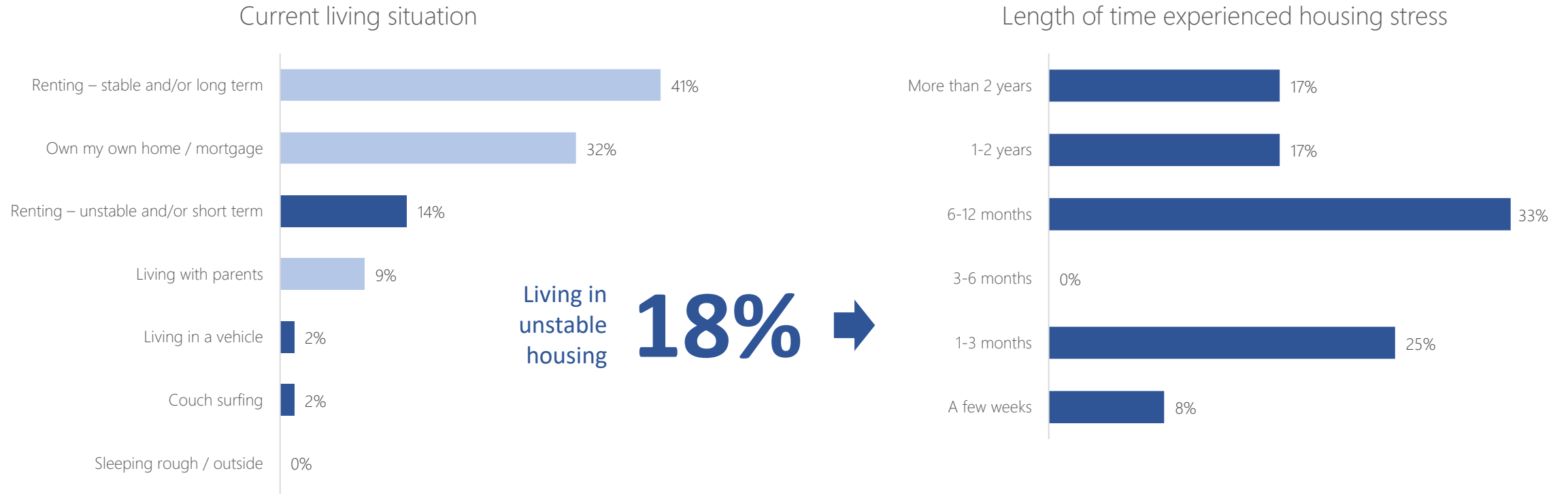
# Mental health issues are frequent and many would benefit from additional support



- Experiencing a mental health issue is common
- More than nine in ten have had a mental health issue at some point
- Two thirds currently have a mental health issue and three in ten would benefit from additional help in dealing with it

- Housing and friend relationships are rated most positively, however, around one in six still rate these as 'poor' to not 'great'
- Family of origin relationships are least positive with over a third rating these negatively
- A similar proportion struggle financially

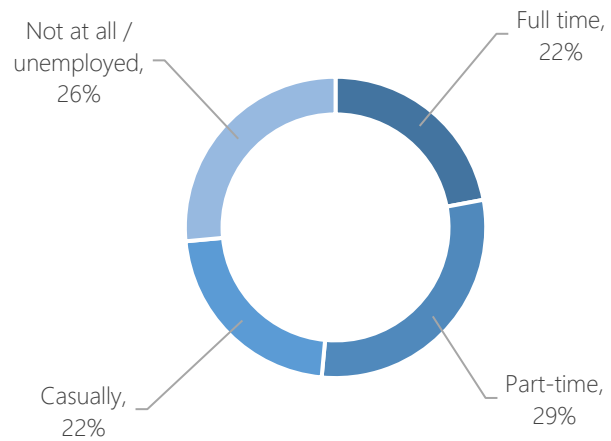
# A significant proportion have unstable housing and for many this is long term



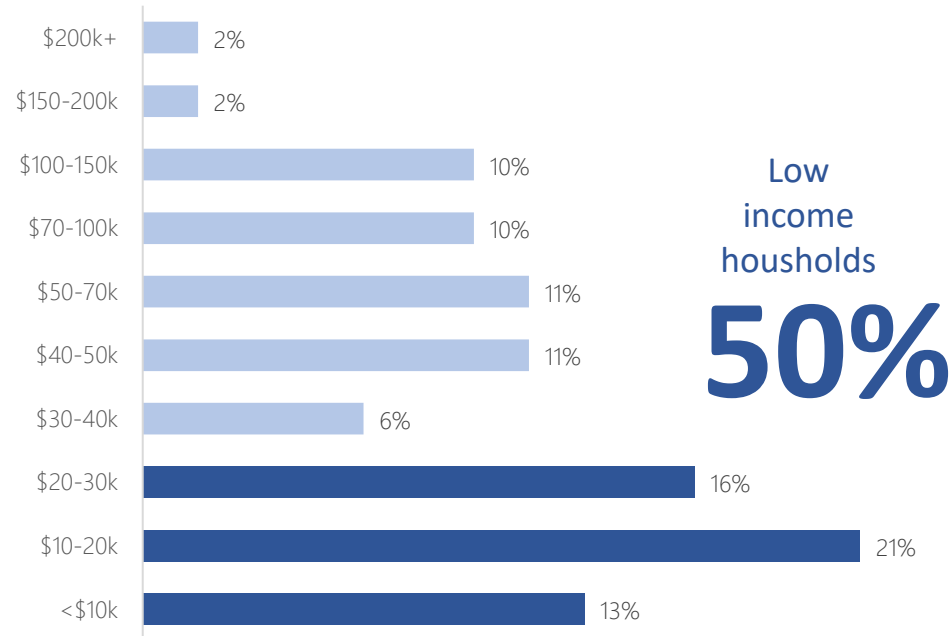
- Most Queer Family members have stable housing with four in ten renting long term and three in ten owning a home
- However, one in five are experiencing housing stress
- Of those in housing stress two thirds have been in this situation for over six months

# Employment and income are unstable for many, relatively few are employed full-time, with half in low income households

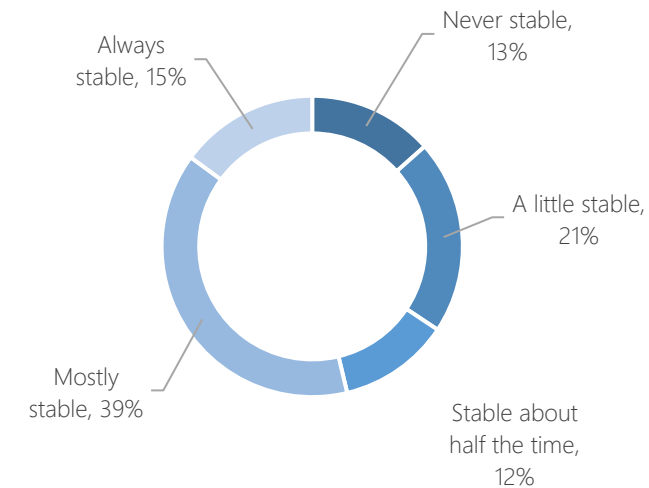
Employment



Income distribution



Income stability



- Employment is not highly stable with a quarter unemployed and almost eight in ten not in full-time work

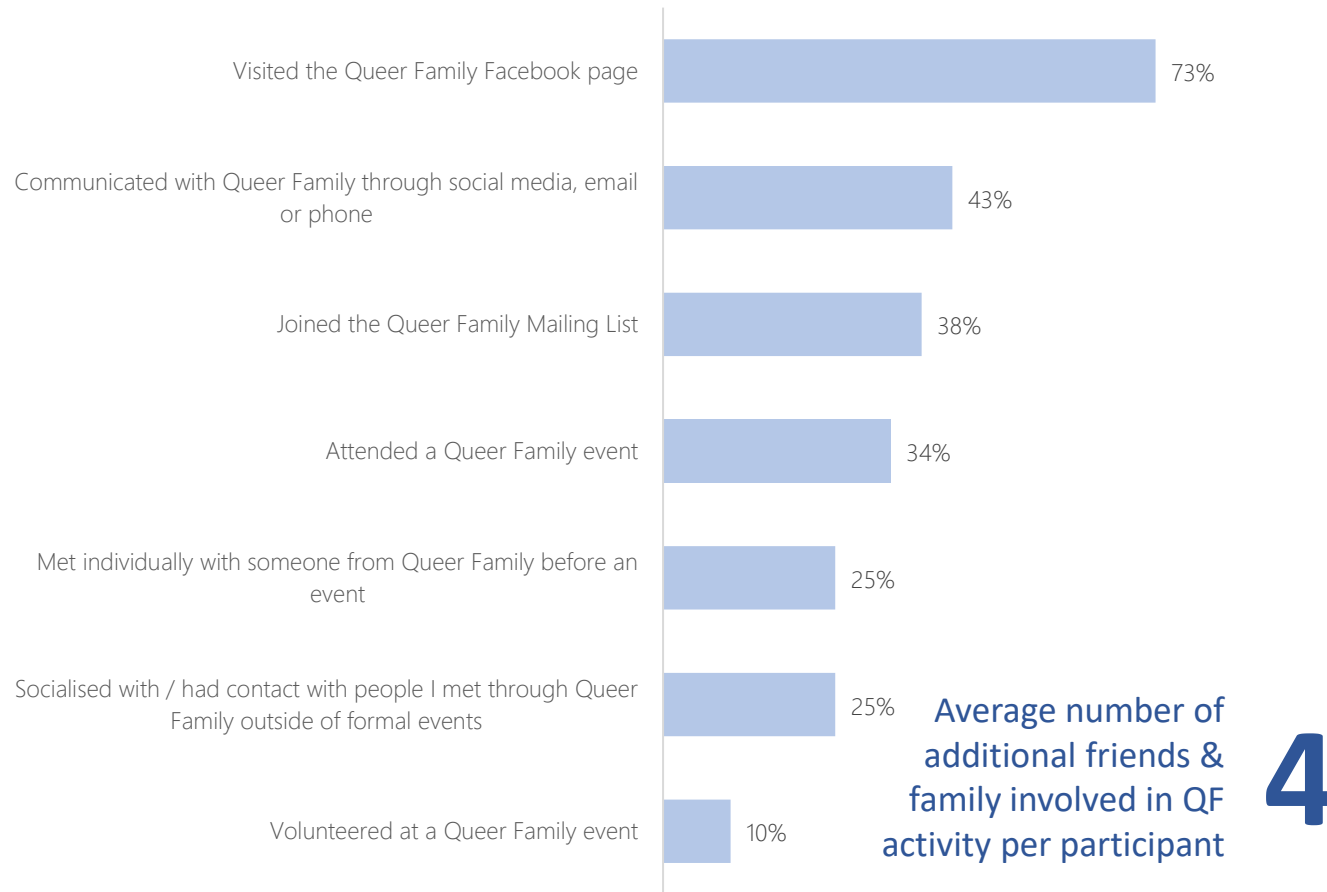
- Half are on low incomes earning less than \$30,000 per year before tax

- Many live with unstable incomes, with over a third indicating their income is stable less than half the time

Research findings  
Queer Family's activities



# Queer Family community members engage in a variety of ways and reach a broad extended family



Most members of the QF community have visited the face book and almost half had contact with Queer Family via social media, email or phone

- A third have participated in Queer Family events

Queer family has significant reach with involvement extending far beyond the individuals included in the study

- On average each participant was involved with an extended group of four other people

QF activity also facilitates social engagement outside of formal events

- One in four of the community have made friends and continued contact externally



## Queer Family offers significant value to the queer community

Community connection

**Connection to a local network** of wonderful queers! I'm recently 'out' and proud about my bi/pan sexuality and feeling like connection, learning and fun is super important. Thank you for existing!

Belonging

Seeing such strong **connection and support** within the Queer Family community **brings me joy**. I think it's really important that everyone has something in their life that brings them a **sense of community** and connection and I think **Queer Family offers this** to a lot of people.

Support & acceptance

Company. **Acceptance**. Understanding of others' perspectives within the lgbti+ community. **Not feeling so alone.**

Safety

A sense of family and other people around me that have **similar life experiences I can talk about** with them.

Wellbeing

Having a queer community (**support, friends, acceptance**) in Byron which is **nonexistent without Queer Family**.

It's so important to me to stay connected to other queer friends and community. We are a minority in society and **impacted in many ways that affect wellbeing**.





Simply put, it's brought me a **community where I had none** before. I moved to the area a year and a half ago and still struggle to meet people or have much of a social network. **Queer Family has opened a big door** and said 'come in, what do you need?'

It's helped me **break down** a lot of the **shyness** and awkwardness I felt in expressing myself and questions around and in lgbtqi identity and community.

It brought a lot of **joy, openness, safety** and **acceptance** to my life!



What Queer Family offers is unique in the Byron Shire – queer people would need to travel outside of the region for similar support and community

QF is unique

87%

Say there are **no other organisations** in the Byron Shire that provide the benefits offered by Queer Family

ACON and Tropical Fruits were the two relevant agencies identified. Both are located in Lismore and Queer Family has a collaborative and healthy relationship with them.

Other supports mentioned were not local, inactive, not actually LGBTQIA+ or exclude significant parts of the queer community.



# Different community members gain a range of positive social and mental health outcomes from Queer Family's activity

% agree with each statement	Queer	Questioning	Allies
Provides support for people like me	84%	83%	71%
Helps me find other LGBTQIA+ people	81%	83%	79%
Helps me socialise and make new friends	81%	100%	82%
Has made me feel less alone / isolated	77%	83%	71%
Allows me to support my queer friends / family	76%	83%	89%
Has enabled me to become involved in the queer community	76%	100%	86%
Helps me manage / improve my mental health	71%	100%	71%
Has helped me to understand the needs of queer people (family, friends and other people)	69%	83%	86%
Has improved my quality of life	61%	50%	64%
Has helped because I am new to the area	53%	67%	36%
Has helped me understand my own gender / sexuality better	32%	67%	43%
Has helped me with coming out	27%	50%	18%

Most community members identifying as LGBTQIA+ agree that QF provides social and emotional support

- Three quarters to over eight in ten feel QF helps with social connection
- More than seven in ten say it helps them with their mental health

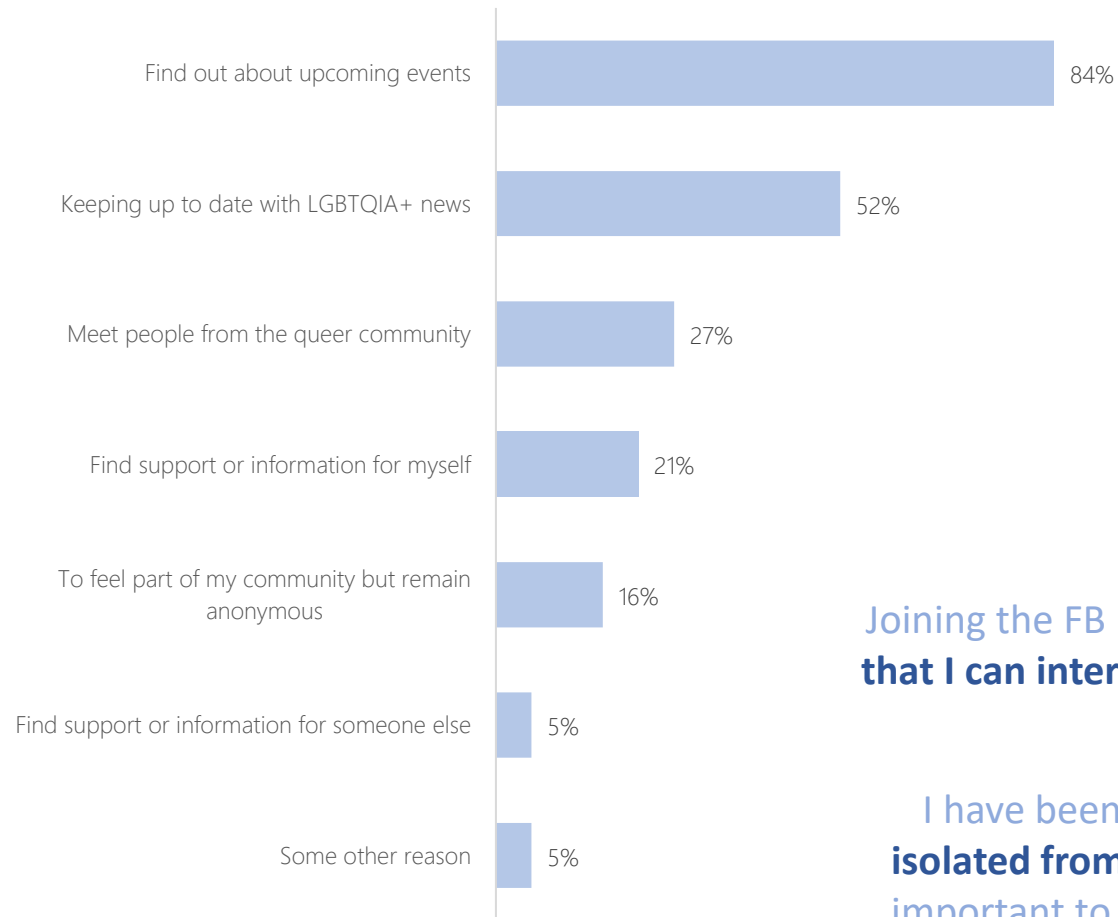
There are additional benefits for those questioning their identity

- More than eight in ten of those who are unsure of their identity have found QF helpful in understanding the needs of queer people

Allies agree that QF helps them to support their queer friends and family as well as make new friends



# The Facebook page is a valuable resource for the community to keep up to date, meet queer people and find support information



The primary use of the Facebook page is to find out about upcoming events

- More than eight in ten using it for this purpose
- Over half use it to keep up to date with LGBTQIA+ news
- A quarter use it to meet people in the community
- One in six feel part of the community while remaining anonymous
- A quarter to find support or information for themselves or someone else

Joining the FB page has made me feel that there is a **network of people that I can interact with** and events I can go to where I can **feel included**.

I have been living in Byron bay for 7 years. In that time **I have felt isolated from the queer community**. Although I do have friends, it is important to me to have **Queer Family that I can relate to and feel a sense of belonging**.

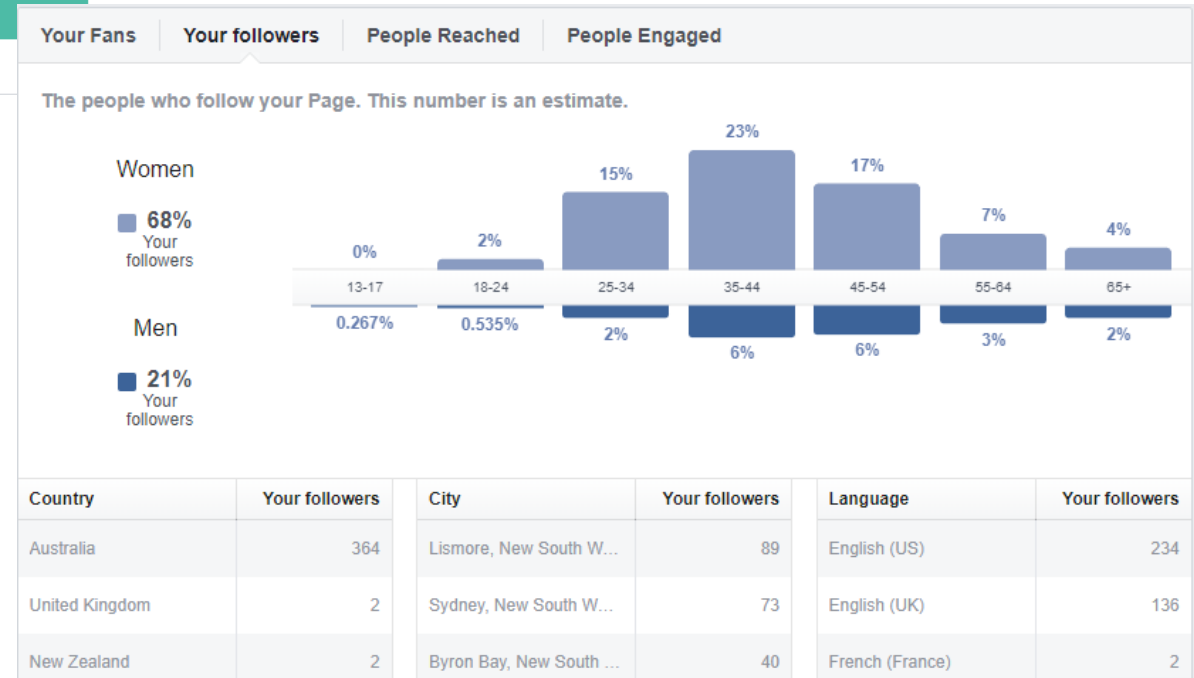
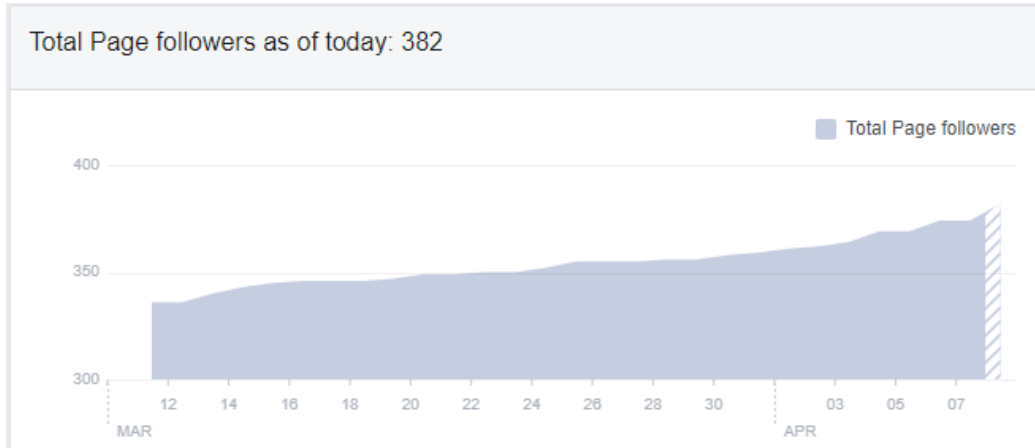


# Facebook engagement and activity statistics show a vibrant and growing online community



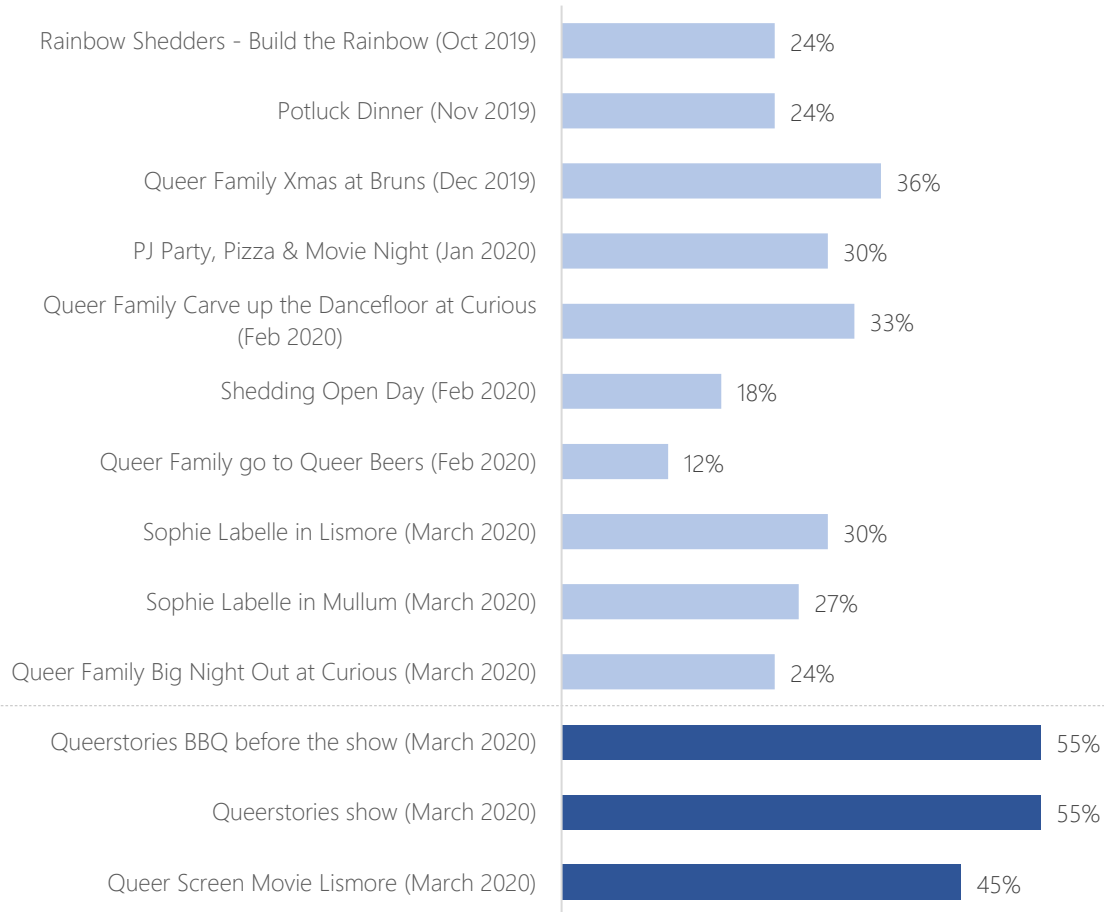
The Queer Family Facebook page continues to grow with almost 400 current members

- Facebook reach is predominantly the Byron and Lismore regions
- Members actively respond to events via the page

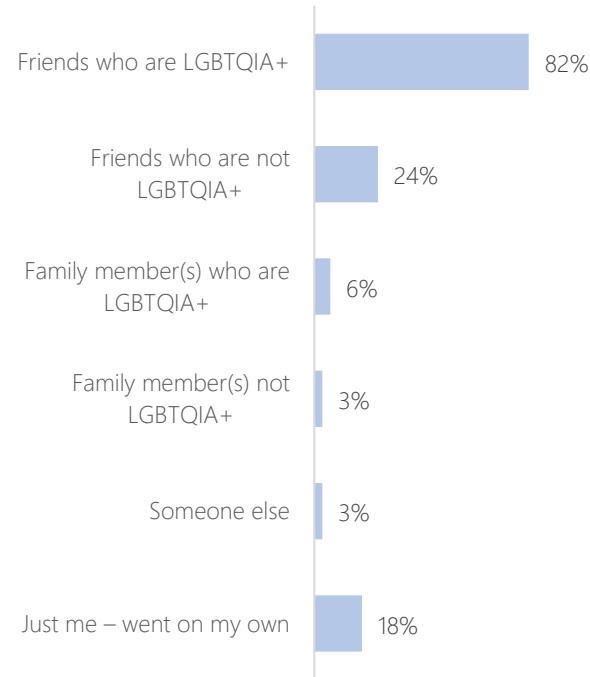


# Queer Family events are broadly attended by queer people, their friends and family in the local region

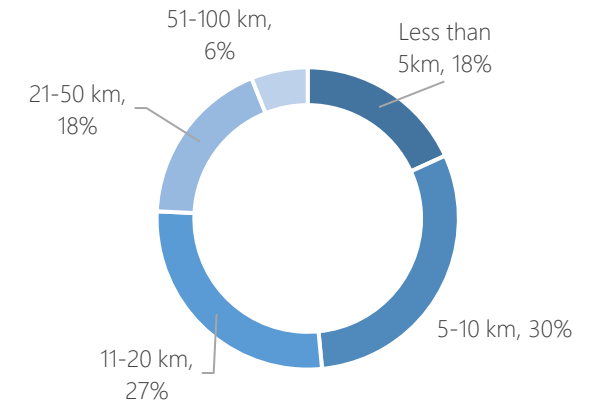
Events attended



Who attended with



Distance travelled to events



- There was broad attendance at all events
- Planned attendance at upcoming events was strong
- Most attended with friends who are LGBTQIA+
- One in five attended on their own
- Events largely supported the local community with half travelling less than 10km and three quarters up to 20 km

Events postponed due to COVID-19 pandemic. Participants indicated they were planning on attending these events.

Queer Family events are highly valued enabling queer people to connect with supportive people with common life stories

90%

Of event attendees rated the events as 'very positive'

I love meeting new people, **making friends** and hanging out in a fun and **supportive environment.**



I have so much fun. It is really great to be with other people who are like me. It's a really lovely way to **meet friends** and I've met some great people through Queer Family. **I was struggling to meet people before this.**

I can attend and participate as community member. Hear stories and **connect with community.** Share and collaborate to **resolve common issues.**





Most would like to continue to participate in the future



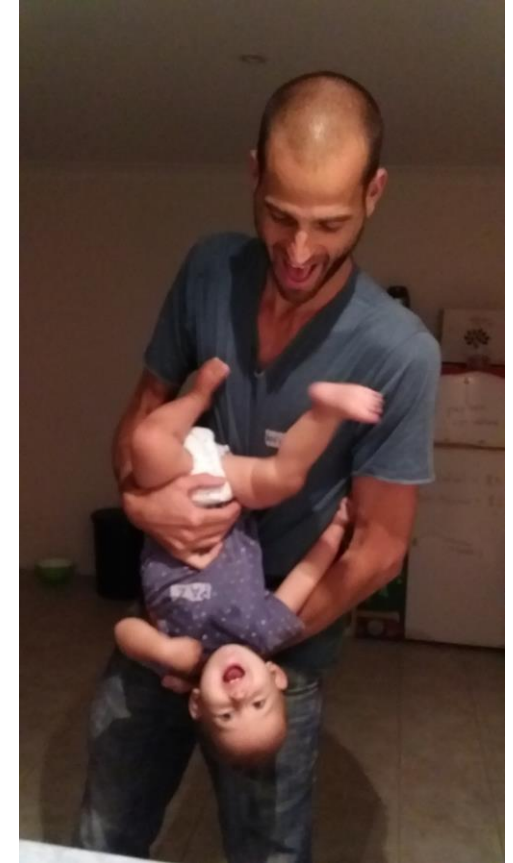
**Connection Connection Connection.** It's been great to meet some new queer friends. I **feel less isolated** from the queer community, living in a small town.

These events are inclusive and **educational, support mental health** and sharing. They are fun and light hearted with the opportunity to **form connections** and relationships.



Queer Family gives me **purpose**. It helps me **find my community**. It helps me **not feel so alone**.

Everyone was really lovely and it helped me **feel less awkward and isolated**.



**81%** Of event attendees intend to attend another event



After **so many years** of not feeling like I was "gay enough" to fit into queer community yet not feeling "straight enough" to fit into straight community I've **always felt a little displaced** and **on the outer** when it came to feeling like I belonged.

Now that I'm involved with **Queer Family** I feel **wholeheartedly accepted as me**, at whatever point on the queer spectrum I fall. I've been introduced to queer terms I never knew existed and finally found one that feels like the **right fit for me** ie. "pansexual."

I have gained **strong friendships** from my involvement with queer family, so strong they **actually feel like family**, and I know that I will have these people **in my life forever**.





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