

THE COUNTRY NETWORKER

REACHING ACROSS AUSTRALIA

MAR/APR 2024



ACROSS THE COUNTRY



new email →

A while back, Jeff (our president) in one of his emails to members, encouraged us to write something for Country Networker, this newsletter. It could be anything...within reason, obviously not something like a diatribe slagging someone off. Anyway, I have written a free verse poem in honor of my father, which you can read in this edition.

Have you seen the film "All of Us Strangers" yet? I thought it was outstanding, even though I didn't like the ending and some scenes made me cry. The two main actors, Andrew Scott and Paul Mescal, were faultless and looked amazing together (I'll marry either of them, thanks). See this film!!
And take tissues.

Some people might not know this, but I'm not the only person working on our newsletter. Cameron does the design and layout and then the distribution of the finished Country Networker.

John Holden

Editor

CONTACT US

COUNTRY NETWORKER

editor@countrynetwork.com.au

Write a book review, Report on a group activity. It doesn't have to be a literary masterpiece, but of interest to our members

Any article ideas are accepted for review. Our member interests are wide and varied, so share your favourite topic with our members!.

EDITORIAL

John Holden

Editor

DESIGN

Cameron Mason

CONTRIBUTORS

Jeffrey Sproal



president's report

Hello members,



I am writing this report late at night before Peter and I leave for a weekend of sin and debauchery in Sydney for Mardi Gras weekend. On Thursday 29th Feb we are going to see Carlotta at the Hyde Theatre. Many older members will probably remember Carlotta, a drag performer now in her 80th year. We are looking forward to the evening's entertainment.

The Mardi Gras parade is not without its controversy this year. Recently the Mardi Gras Board decided to refuse the NSW police the ability to march in the parade. The Board felt that the members of the LGBTIQIA+ community along with the people of NSW needed time to grieve the deaths of two young men, murdered by a NSW policeman. This caused somewhat of an uproar. Fortunately the respective parties got together and resolved the situation, the police will march but not in their uniforms. I am so glad this situation has been resolved.

I know there has been some very bad feeling in the LGBTIQIA+ community over what took place in Sydney over 50 years ago, when a number of gay men were murdered. One those young men murdered was a member of Country Network. The police at the time did not do their job and many of those murders remain unsolved, among them the Country Network member. I would like to think that we as a community can forgive the inaction and failure of the police and move on with making sure this sort of thing does not happen again.

Tied together with all of this is the opening of Qtopia. The old Darlinghurst police station, the scene of some terrible happenings against the homosexual community all those years ago, is now the home of a museum that depicts those times and also the communities response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic as it emerged in Sydney in the early 1980s. I am looking forward to visiting Qtopia and seeing for myself the stories and feeling the pain of those homosexual men as they fought to do away with those unjust laws of the past. We have much to thank them for, as they gave so much and succeeded in their endeavours.





I recently sent a letter out asking for expressions of interest towards Country Network having a float in the 2025 Mardi Gras Parade. If you are interested, please contact Llyle Wentworth at llyle@countrynetwork.com.au It would be great to have a float next year 10 years after the 2015 CN float. Think about it and let Llyle know.

To all our members who are not feeling the best or who are in hospital, we wish you all the very best and a speedy recovery to full health.

Adding a picture to your profile!

You may have noticed that some members have added their photo to their member profile. Want to know how?

[Read More →](#)

Jeffrey P. Sproal

President
email: president@countrynetwork.com.au
mobile: 0412 651 429

Your gay doctor online Available 7 days a week



Get started online heyfella.com.au



PrEP Online
Online phone appointment
Includes STI screening & consult



STI Test
Get tested easily with an online request. Australia wide






Doctor Consultation
Get the health advice you need quickly, discreetly & conveniently



Online Prescriptions
Sent to your phone as an eScript. Take to any pharmacy



-  Same day phone appointments
-  Gay doctors for gay men – no awkward consults
-  All online & save time. No waiting rooms.



membership update

Welcome new members!

First Name	Last Name	Suburb/Town	State	Date Joined
Phillip	Yew	Shoalhaven	NSW	16/01/2024
Brian	Davis	Reids Flat	NSW	23/01/2024
Walter	Thomasson	Albury	NSW	31/01/2024
Ray	Cranbrook	Taylor's Flat	NSW	7/02/2024
Richard	Grainger	Royal Exchange	NSW	7/02/2024
David	Martin	Albury	NSW	13/02/2024
Keith	Stephens	Cooma	NSW	18/02/2024
Kevin	Watton	Oakley	QLD	12/02/2024
Craig	Mudge	Jamestown	SA	4/02/2024
Graham	Stewart	East Perth	WA	3/02/2024
Donald	Cavanagh	Marylands	WA	13/02/2024
First Name	Last Name	Suburb/Town	State	Date Cancelled
Mark	Pizaro	Lara	VIC	15/01/2024
Gregory	Brydon	Ulverstone	TAS	19/02/2024

Paid members to date: 274

Free Members: 19

Total Members: 293



Hyle Wentworth

Membership Coordinator



TO MY FATHER

In 1945
when my father came home
no-one wanted to know
what he'd been through

A fugitive prisoner of war
stumbling through a forest
trying to reach the Allies
avoiding SS troops
who hunted deserters

At night, covered in twigs and leaves
he slept under bushes
one morning he was woken
by screams and crying

He froze
dared not move a muscle

SS troops had
a dozen boys
child soldiers
in ill-fitting uniforms
huddling together

One by one
the boys met their end
piano wire
around their necks

In 1945
when my father came home
he retreated to his bedroom
for a year

"Just try to forget the war, love"
his mother said, wellmeaning



John Holden



HOW TO INTRODUCE YOUR SAME-SEX PARTNER TO YOUR PARENTS

By Emen8

All those years of dating in a hook-up world and thinking you'd never meet a decent guy have finally paid off. You've moved from 'just dating' to 'in a relationship', and you've started sharing your lives, friendships, and a Netflix account — obviously getting serious. There's just one last hurdle. He hasn't met your parents.

Whether your parents are your best friends, or you just have to tick the box — ideally, you want him to be welcomed as part of the family. But maybe you haven't introduced your parents to a same-sex partner before, or you're not sure how they're going to react.

It's a daunting proposition. But with good communication and a lot of love, you can make that first introduction the beginning of a fantastic new chapter for everyone.

1. Make sure this isn't also your coming-out story

While it may seem like a great 'two birds with one stone' opportunity, introducing your boyfriend as a way of coming out to your parents might be overwhelming for everybody involved.

Coming out can be a complicated time for families, especially if your parents are conservative or come from a cultural background that doesn't embrace your sexuality. It's important to give your parents time and privacy to process it in their own way before you bring your significant other into the mix.

2. Discuss it with your parents beforehand

Ask your parents how they'd feel about meeting your boyfriend well ahead of time. Tell them how important it is to you that your family and your partner get to know one another.

If they're not as open to the idea as you were hoping, ask them to think about it and tell them you'd like to talk about it again in a couple of weeks. If they do eventually warm to the idea, chat through what might make them comfortable on the day.





3. Discuss it with your boyfriend beforehand as well

He needs to know what he's in for! Even if your parents are generally supportive, it's still a good idea to let him know what they're like and what he should expect. If you've already discussed it with your parents, tell him their reaction so he can be prepared.

It's also a good opportunity for you to see how he's feeling about it and be able to support him if he's nervous. Priming him with a few good topics of conversation can help him feel confident going in, even if everybody is excited to meet each other.

4. Keep it short and casual

While it might be a big deal for everyone involved, marking the occasion with a fancy, hours-long dinner could be torture. Coffee, brunch, or lunch are usually safer options – enough time to get first impressions, but not enough time to run out of things to say.

If you live far away from your parents and you're just visiting (or they are), try to make independent accommodation arrangements for you and your partner. Sharing a house on the day you first meet might be a little awkward!

5. Find a location that's comfortable for everyone

An invitation to lunch at the family home might be your parents' way of showing their hospitality, but it may not be the most comfortable place for your partner to meet them. Try to choose a place that's neutral like a park or a café, so that nobody has the home-ground advantage. A relaxed, public place makes it easier to keep the occasion casual and removes any pressure around cooking a meal or overstaying your welcome.

6. Keep the conversation light

Be prepared for some awkwardness and gaps in the conversation – you will probably need to play moderator some of the time. It can help to introduce your partner with a little starter to help break the ice: "Dad, this is Ben. I was just telling him about your slow cooker – he loves to cook too." Try to find common ground between your parents and your partner and give them a nudge when necessary (e.g. cooking, gardening, fitness, sport, travel – so that everybody will have something to contribute).

It's probably a good idea to avoid controversial topics. If you think your parents might feel awkward talking about things like money, religion, politics, sexuality, or gender, then prep your partner with the no-go areas. We know it might feel a bit strange holding back, but it's just about getting the first meeting done without too much drama.

Be gentle, compassionate and supportive – let everyone make their own first impression on their own terms.



our community

7. Don't get drunk

You may find it tempting to have a drink to take the edge off a stressful situation.

If you're going to do this, make sure you know when to stop. You'll want to remember this as the day you introduced the most important people in your life to each other, not the day you had four wines before lunch, yelled at your parents and threw up in a café!

8. Give everyone some time before you debrief

If your parents have had trouble accepting your same-sex relationship, you might find that they need some time. Thank them for coming and tell them how much it means to you that they've met your significant other. Tell them you'd love to talk about it more once they've had time to process.

This goes for your partner, too! Acknowledge that it might have been a stressful occasion for him as well and reassure him with how you feel about him.

9. Be prepared for the possibility that it might not go well

Families are complicated. If your parents have had trouble accepting your sexuality, they may not ever be completely comfortable with your same-sex partner – or they just may not be ready yet.

If the introduction doesn't go well, make sure you're getting the support you need, both from your partner and from the other important people in your life. Make time to talk about it and try to keep communication open with your parents. With time, hopefully they'll realise that, even if it's not who they imagined, the person you love can still be as much a part of the family as you are.



The hazards of a tidy taint

Does trimming your pubic hair expose you to more than the breeze? We take a look at the facts and figures around intimate grooming and STIs.

Are you trim and tidy inside your trunks, or do you wear your ass-beard with pride?

If you're among the 66 per cent of men who do groom their intimate areas, you may be exposing yourself to more than the breeze.

What does the research say about grooming and STIs?

A [2016 study](#) found a direct positive correlation between the removal of pubic hair and having an STI. Among the 7580 participants, people who groomed were 80 per cent more likely to have had an STI than people who didn't.

Of the groomers, 17 per cent were 'extreme' — completely removing all their intimate hair at least 11 times a year — and 22 per cent were 'high frequency' groomers, trimming at least once a week. These two groups were 3.5-4 times more likely to have had an STI than respondents with a more natural look.

But don't bin your clippers just yet. It's important to note that the research doesn't prove that grooming is causing a greater incidence of STIs. While it's reasonable to assume that having less pubic hair makes you more susceptible to infections transmitted skin-to-skin (like [genital warts](#) and [genital herpes](#)), it's not really understood why groomers are more at risk of [other STIs](#).

One theory is that all that shaving, scraping and waxing causes microtears in your delicate, baby-smooth skin. Microtears are, unsurprisingly, tiny cuts or tears in the skin, which are usually too small to see. You can also cause microtears (and have more fun doing it) when you have anal sex. In either case they're an express pathway into the body for bacteria and viruses, including those that cause STIs. Even without microtears, hair removal can often cause ingrown hairs, inflammation, pimples and even abscesses, which can all break the skin and increase your risk of acquiring an STI.

Is grooming the whole picture?

Another possibility raised is that people who are grooming more often are just having more sex (i.e. you're more likely to mow the verge if you're expecting visitors). People in the study who had sex weekly were far more likely to be frequent or extreme groomers, though which behaviour came first isn't discussed.

no matter how you style your basement, using condoms and [getting tested regularly](#) (and treated if necessary) are still the best ways to avoid STIs such as [chlamydia](#), [gonorrhoea](#) and [syphilis](#). A healthy body is a sexy body, with or without hair.



THE SIDE GUIDE: A (NOT SO) NEW GAY SEXUAL POSITION

By Emen8

You'd be lying if you haven't sat on the couch and devoured a whole bag of chips for dinner. So why judge others for enjoying the same?

Leaving the pun a-side, practicing side fun has become popular down under. I'll take you through the history and meaning of sides and give you some in-side-r tips on how to please one.

What does it mean to be a gay side?

A side is a person who doesn't engage in fucking or being penetrated, but instead prefers oral sex, rimming, frottage, mutual masturbation, hand jobs, and other non-penetrative activities. These sexual acts are often referred to as foreplay, side fun, or outercourse.

Regardless of what we call them, these practices make up as much of sex as anal does. Like all sexuality, sides exist on a spectrum. Some sides don't engage in penetration at all, while others may occasionally do anal, for instance, with a trusted partner.

A brief history of sides

Although the word 'side' has only recently emerged, the practice of non-penetrative sex has existed for a long time. The ancient Greeks, notorious for their homosexual behaviours, engaged in intercrural sex (thrusting between a guy's thighs). And in response to the HIV epidemic in the '1980s, some guys advocated for frotting (sexual rubbing) as a way to be intimate while staying safe from HIV.

The term 'side' was officially coined by sex and relationship therapist Dr Joe Kort in a 2013 article in which he comes to terms with being a side. He writes: "I thought out loud and said I'm not a top and I'm not a bottom, and then I just thought about a box and blurted: maybe I'm a side."





our community

A guide to side fun: for sides and side lovers

Side fun can be hot and intimate; here are some tips on how to make the most of a side sesh:

- Openly communicate what you like and don't like sexually, listen to your partner(s) and remain judgement free
- Some side guys may prefer certain types of side fun – you can be a side dom or sub
- Get creative and try out some [non-penetrative sex positions](#) like the infamous 69 or the lesser-known X position
- Get your head in the game by checking out our [tips for giving mind-blowing oral](#)
- Experiment with some [sex toys for sides](#)

Why are some guys sides?

There are many reasons why gay and bi guys identify as a side, some of which may include:

- Discomfort when bottoming
- Lack of sensation when topping – and enjoying blowjobs and handjobs more
- Having longer sessions
- Less preparation – no more late-night douching!
- Medical conditions that prevent giving or receiving anal – such as not staying hard or having hemorrhoids
- Sexual incompatibility – both being tops or bottoms, having different sex drives or having a cock too big to take!
- Being a side can be liberating for people with physical disabilities or mental health conditions
- Avoiding objectification and stereotypes
- Gender and body dysmorphia

Stigma for sides

Due to ideas around masculinity and queer sex, sides can face backlash for not engaging in anal sex. Any notion that [gay hook-ups must involve anal penetration is a false narrative](#). It also promotes the harmful belief that engaging in anal somehow proves a guy's masculinity. Because of this, some folks might judge sides as not being sexual enough or playing hard to get. Side guys are also more likely to be [rejected sexually and isolated from the gay community](#). Sides can feel like they are sexually inadequate or as if something is wrong with their body.

For these reasons, identifying as a side can feel like another 'coming out', along with all the emotions that come with it. For instance, drag performer Kandy Muse explains that: "In my life, I've had to come out as a queer man, then I had to come out as a drag queen. Then, to my gay friends, I had to come out as a side."



our community

Overcoming stigma

It's time we acknowledge that some people just don't like penetration! Gay and bi guys aren't all the same; we have different bodies, pleasures, and abilities. We need to normalise being a side.

Let's reframe 'foreplay' and other non-penetrative activities – it's still sex, even without penetration. We can help side guys feel great about being a side and more a part of the gay and bi community.

If you think you might be a side, Dr Kort started a [Facebook group 'Side Guys'](#), which you can join to flirt and chat about side-related issues judgment-free with likeminded guys. Let's put an end to side shame, it's a real pain in the arse.





our community



Sydney's long-awaited LGBTQI museum, Qtopia Sydney is set to officially open its doors to the public on Saturday, February 24. Located at and around the old Darlinghurst Police Station (301 Forbes Street), the Qtopia Sydney Campus includes 301 Forbes Street, The Substation, The Bandstand in Green Park, and the Taylor Square Toilet Block. 12 curators (including [Ben Graetz](#), [Liz Bradshaw](#), [George Savoulis](#), [Jeremy Smith](#), [Yiorgos Zafirio](#) And [Bren Donnellan](#), [Beatrice 'Bertie' Blackman](#), and [Laura Castagnini](#)) created 17 exhibitions for the museum's opening.

According to Qtopia Sydney, "A team of curators from all areas of the arts have worked with researchers, historians, established museums, archivists, media organisations and private collectors to create 17 new stories, giving voice to those whose voices have been diminished."

CEO of Qtopia Sydney Greg Fisher said, "On top of our opening exhibitions, we will welcome guests across our three performance venues, kicking off in March with theatre, cabaret, drag, music and more."

Talking about the opening of Qtopia Sydney and what it took to get here, Fisher said, "The opening of Qtopia Sydney represents one of the most colossal examples of community passion and determination ever seen."

"Under the stewardship of a committed Board and a dedicated team, a community has come together. Well established Queer organisations quickly jumped in to support our contribution to the cultural and historical fabric of this city."





our community

Fisher continued, “We pay homage to the countless members and allies of the Queer community in this country on whose shoulders we stand, who gave us ballast, who endured discrimination, separatism and ostracisation so that one day, their stories would be told.” Discussing the museum’s location, NSW Minister for the Arts John Graham said, “Qtopia Sydney’s new and permanent home in the former Darlinghurst Police Station is a significant space for Sydney LGBTQIA+ community. It will be an important place for education, engagement, and artistic expression.

“This heritage-listed building holds a lot of history for members of the LGBTQIA+ community. It will provide a place for exploring ideas and foster a deeper understanding of history and current events. I am pleased to see it’s reimagining as a much-needed cultural space in the centre of Sydney.”

The site of the old Darlinghurst Police Station has an important place in the city’s Queer history. The police station was once associated with the harassment and persecution of Sydney’s LGBTQI community, including 78ers.

In September, the old Darlinghurst Police Station was officially handed over to Qtopia Sydney. Before the handover, the NSW Government was using the old police station as offices for NSW Health.

In a [January interview with Star Observer](#), founding chair David Polson explained that education is the most important part of Qtopia Sydney.

“It’s very much going to be a place of education, and I really want that to be my legacy for Qtopia – that it’s going to educate people, not just next year, and the year after – but in 10 years’ time, 20 years. It’s going to be a continuing process of educating people,” he said. Qtopia Sydney will open to the public on Saturday 24 February from 10:30am until 4:30pm.

For more information visit qtopiasydney.com.au



happenings

Find out about all upcoming events in the following locations:

- Country Network Private Facebook Group
- Country Network website

Don't forget if you would like to organise an event: contact our events coordinator, events@countrynetwork.com.au

It's great to see new events popping up around the country!

Don't forget, anyone can start an event in their area, it's really easy and we will support you by letting all members in your area know about your new event.

There is an easy to follow guide to hosting an event found [HERE](#). To get started just fill out the [event submission form](#) and we will help you with the rest, it's that easy!

Happy Networking

Events Coordinator

Event Grants

Country Network is excited to introduce Event Grants. This is a brand-new concept where we provide members with a financial grant to arrange an event in Country Network (CN).

Why are we doing this?

We would love to see our members come together, get to know each other better, and spend some face-to-face time. And hopefully encourage you to arrange more events.

What do I need to do?

All you have to do is arrange an event for your fellow CN members.

What sort of event?

It could be anything, but some ideas could include:

- Weekends away
- Attending a LGBTI festival or large annual event in your area
- Camping
- 4WDing
- Fishing
- Bushwalking
- Caravanning
- Winery tours
- Photography weekend
- Christmas get-together
- A tour of a historic area or an area of natural beauty.

The list is endless so feel free to use your imagination.



event grants

What else do I need to know?

We are open to hearing all your ideas, but there are a few guidelines as to what sort of an event:

- It needs to be open to all CN members and be inclusive.
- It needs to be something that all members would be comfortable attending and participating in.
- It needs to have a focus on country/rural Australia.
- It needs to be easily accessible by car, public transport etc. Or you can provide lifts or car share.
- It needs to be something substantial like a weekend away, not a coffee morning, pub night or lunch.
- It needs to have a minimum of five people.

How much is the grant?

The amount will vary depending on how many people attend your event, the number of overall submissions we receive and the overall costs of your event, but as a general guideline, we will offer between \$500 to \$1000 as a grant. The money, to be shared among all event attendees, can go towards accommodation, food, transport, general costs etc. However, you can't claim more than the event cost.

What do I do next?

Just submit the following event details by 15th October 2023 via email to president@countrynetwork.com.au

- Event idea
- Location
- Type of accommodation (if applicable)
- Time of year (approx. is okay)
- Number of people you require to attend, or hope to attend (approx.)
- Planned/possible activities for the event.

Don't worry if you cannot get your idea to us by October. We will have other rounds of Event Grants over the 2023/34 year.

Note - if you want to arrange an event before the cut-off date, we are happy to consider your submission earlier.

What else do I have to do?

The event organiser or an attendee will need to write a short article for the CN newsletter (100-200 words) plus supply some photos within a month of the event happening.

What if I have some questions?

If you have any questions or would like to run an idea past someone, please contact President Jeff on 0412 651 429 or at president@countrynetwork.com.au