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Win the ultimate Mardi Gras experience

>> GIVEAWAY

In celebration of the news that Kylie is coming home, Sydney Mardi Gras is offering one Harbour '12 - Coolchange paid ticket holder the ultimate money-can't-buy Mardi Gras VIP experience.

The winner and their guest will meet the Harbour '12 cast. They'll also be on the guest list to the invitation-only Mardi Gras VIP Party on March 1, where they will get to meet more stars including Sydney Mardi Gras performers.

They'll also win premium tickets to the Mardigrasland party, including VIP access to the more glitterati moments of the night, plus signed Sydney Mardi Gras artwork, CDs and a few other surprises.

INFO: To enter, buy your Harbour '12 - Coolchange ticket before noon on Friday, February 24 2012 and you'll be automatically added to the draw. Current ticket holders have been automatically entered into the draw, which will take place at the Mardi Gras offices at 5pm on February 24. Winners will be contacted.



Anti-bully advocates fight back

>> VICTORIA
ANDIE NOONAN

Gay rights advocates and a Jewish community body have rejected a rabbi's claims a government funded anti-homophobic bullying scheme is teaching "moral wrong".

In an article for the Australian Family Association journal, Institute for Judaism and Civilization director Rabbi Dr Shimon Cowen wrote that anti-bullying initiative Safe Schools Coalition Victoria (SSCV) is "unethical" because it teaches children about homosexuality which goes against the word of God.

"As part of its program, [SSCV] requires schools to teach the acceptability of homosexual behaviour as a norm. By so doing, it flies in the face of over 3000 years of religious and cultural tradition since Sinai," the Melbourne-based rabbi wrote.

Cowen, also an associate of Monash University's School of Philosophical, Historical and International Studies, claims the anti-bullying program breaches religious rights.

"The notion that every child in a school ... must be taught in the school from infancy that homosexual behaviour is equally normative is coercive," he said.

"State institutions are being required by it to teach values which override and negate the teachings of the traditional world religions and so infringe religious liberty."

In November, the Baillieu Government awarded the SSCV program \$416,000 to expand its work.

SSCV coordinator Roz Ward slammed Cowen's attack. She said schools, including Progressive Jewish school King David, have opted into the program, which aims to create a supportive environment for same-sex attracted teens at risk of being bullied.

"Our research ... shows a clear link between homophobic bullying and levels of self-harm and suicide," Ward told the *Star Observer*.

"Saying there should be a level of safety and welfare for the health of students in schools is not an ideological position, it's a bare minimum."

Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ) executive director Peter Wertheim said Cowen's views were not representative of the larger Jewish community.

"The ECAJ reiterates its and the Australian Jewish community's strong opposition to bullying at school on any grounds, including sexual orientation, and welcomes any government program designed to counteract bullying that has the support of victims and educators," he said.

Gay Jewish support group Aleph convenor Michael Barnett accused Cowen of using "junk science" to back up his claims.

"Tradition is not an argument for pulling apart a proven, accredited support program," Barnett said.



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Religion no excuse for prejudice

ed's view

with ANDIE NOONAN
 @star_observer

Apparently a program to stop homophobic bullying in schools is a bad thing. Who would have thought?

Thankfully, not everyone shares the views of Rabbi Dr Shimon Cowen who has penned a particularly repellent piece for the Australian Family Association (AFA) claiming anti-homophobic bullying program Safe Schools Coalition Victoria (SSCV) is 'coercing' schools to accept homosexuality as a normal part of life.

Because that wouldn't be right, would it?

I'm sure this might come as a shock to Rabbi Cowen but not everyone is beholden to beliefs formed thousands of years ago. Or, quelle horreur, believes in God, or what such a deity might have to say about who people fall in love with.

His diatribe is not entirely surprising — a glance at the AFA's list of patrons sees the charming Margaret Court at the top.

It seems Cowen is terrified that students learning to treat same-sex attracted students with dignity and respect will lead them down a one-way road to G.A.Y.

Cowen claims the program forces children to prematurely identify and confirm their sexual orientation, thus forcing unwanted gayness upon them. What nonsense. What he fails to address is the real harm same-sex attracted young people face at the hands of playground bullies.

It's no coincidence that 2010 La Trobe University research suggests up to 80 percent of homophobic abuse experienced by young people occurs in schools.

Suicide rates among same-sex attracted young people are said to be three times higher — and up to six times higher in rural and regional areas — than

their straight counterparts.

The SSCV program doesn't trick people into becoming same-sex attracted. What it does is create a safe environment for those young people struggling with their identity because they are told they are an abomination, not equal, unnatural.

A great deal of this is coming from religion itself.

Rabbi Cowen is allowed to believe what he likes about homosexuality and what his faith has to say about it. But his moral compass is his own. If his piece proves anything, it's the importance of separating state and religion when addressing programs like these.

The bottom line on tanning

good health

with DR GEORGE FORGAN-SMITH
General Practitioner



Australians have always had a reputation for being sun worshippers with some tanners using sun beds as an alternative to time in the sun.

Offering a concentrated dose of UV light, sun beds almost double the risk of developing malignant melanoma.

Around 2007, Australians became more aware of the potential risks of sun beds when 26-year-old Clare Oliver died of metastatic melanoma that was diagnosed when she was 21.

During her life she had significant sun

exposure, however, a large portion of her increased melanoma risk was attributed to a special "buy 10, get 20 tanning sessions" voucher she bought at the age of 19.

While some people claim that sun beds have the health benefit of increasing vitamin D levels, a vitamin created in the skin after exposure to UVB rays, this is not the case. The high-pressure lamps in most solariums produce mainly UVA waves that penetrate deep into the skin, causing damage at the deeper skin levels.

So what's the bottom line on sun beds?

It is well established that tanning is one of the main factors in developing skin cancers. Sun beds accelerate the process, exposing users to higher levels of radiation over shorter periods of time. They are not

recommended.

As the community becomes more aware of the risks associated with sun exposure, people have started looking for alternative ways to tan without the sun.

One injectable product that has seen increasing use is melanotan, also known as "the Barbie drug". Melanotan is a peptide designed to stimulate melanocytes, the skin cells responsible for tanning but also melanoma.

Melanotan is an untested medicine currently sold via a number of technical loopholes in many countries.

If your skin is already damaged and you have early melanoma, adding a medicine that is going to stimulate these cells has the potential to accelerate melanoma

throughout the body.

Given that melanoma needs only one damaged cell to start, is this a risk you would be willing to take?

Guys, protect your safety. Do not purchase any medication that is untested, potentially illegal, and that may accelerate the risk of deadly cancer.

Is there such a thing as a safe tan?

In my honest opinion, the answer is no. As an Australian, I consider my risk of skin cancer way too high to be interested in having a "healthy glow".

For those who are keen to have the darker tones to their skin, I recommend considering spray tans and other non-invasive options. Is your life really worth that tan?



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paradise pickings

with ANABELL THOENER
ACON Coffs Harbour



Coastal Castaways Taree's LGBTIQ social group is organising a Bear Camp. This is the group's annual men-only weekend and it is their fourth camp.

- [read more at www.starobserver.com.au](http://www.starobserver.com.au)

good sports

with WALLY SALINGER
sports fanatic



Have you ever stood amongst parents on the sidelines of a soccer, rugby, basketball or swimming event?

- [read more at www.starobserver.com.au](http://www.starobserver.com.au)

listening post

with GERRY NORTH
Relationship counsellor



Sean and Paul met eight years ago. They live together, they love each other but they rarely have sex any more and if they ever do it, it is on a Saturday morning before the shopping.

- [read more at www.starobserver.com.au](http://www.starobserver.com.au)

speaking out

with JUSTIN KOONIN
NSW Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby



It is greatly encouraging our leaders are increasingly seeing that equality for gay and lesbian people and their families is an issue of human rights.

- [read more at www.starobserver.com.au](http://www.starobserver.com.au)

well well well

with BUDI SUDARTO
Victorian AIDS Council
Gay Men's Health Centre



How difficult is it for gay men to talk about emotions, feelings and personal expectations with their partners?

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