

# Optimistic light

A new charity is promoting understanding and acceptance of diversity, finds Amanda Leek

**C**HARLES McArthur is a charismatic 19-year-old law and arts student. He's always considered himself a positive person.

But when he reflected on why he'd been afraid of coming out as gay in high school, he realised he'd feared not being accepted rather than the bigotry or hate he might face. This experience — and hearing about others — revealed a lack of mental healthcare or professional help for youths. So Charles decided to do something about it: to create a collaborative light at the end of the tunnel.

The Bright Light Project is a new charity promoting awareness and acceptance of diversity. Bright Light obtained limited company status last week and is waiting on charity confirmation this week. It is inspired by Stonewall in the UK, Erase Hate in the US, and Minus 18 in Australia.

The Bright Light Project is forming links with groups that have similar aims and is keen to talk to the new Auckland Council and the mayor. Their support will be needed.

Charles says a culture of fear puts teens at risk of mental problems. "Growing up as a teen you are influenced by what you think other people think of you. I know there is a huge fear

## PRETTY LAME

Charles says homophobic jokes, comments and using the word "gay" as an adjective for "lame" or "bad", reinforced the perception he was alone. "I felt unable to be truthful about who I was." But he found once he talked about it, people changed their behaviour. For more info on the Bright Light Project, email Charles at: [mcarthur.charles@gmail.com](mailto:mcarthur.charles@gmail.com)

that if people know you are gay, you won't be accepted and you will lose your friends and family."

The Bright Light Project aims to tackle bullying and discrimination without limiting itself to one particular issue. But the high-profile suicides of six gay teenagers in the US in October this year related to homophobic bullying sparked the first issue.

Since then, with co-founders Sam Judson and Melanie Govender, the objectives have been honed. "The first one would be to reform or alter sex education at schools," says Charles.

"The majority of information on STDs and contraception doesn't have much relevance to a homosexual student. There is just not enough attention on sexual orientation and information or mental health support for people who are having problems related to that."

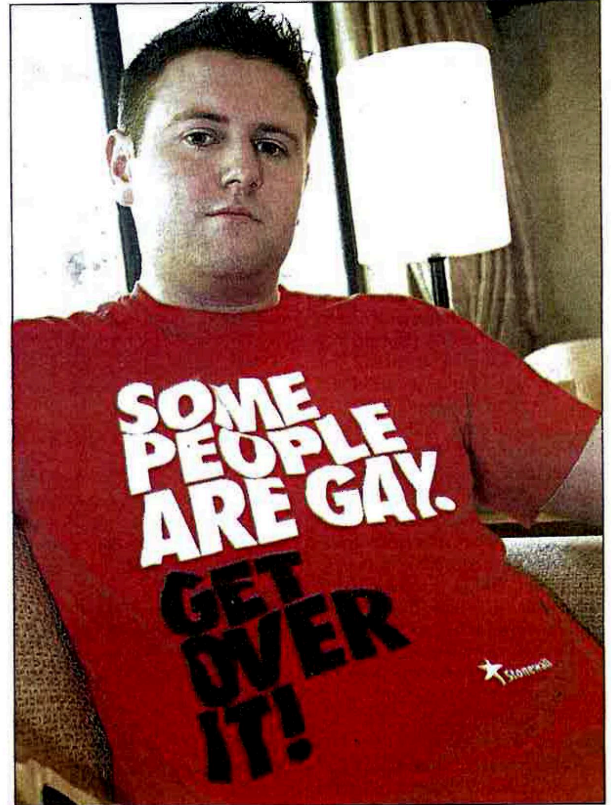
Charles finds this shocking after *The New Zealand Medical Journal* reported: "Young people of gay, lesbian or bisexual orientation had rates of suicidal ideation and attempt that were over five times those of heterosexual youth."

He appreciates in-school counsellors do an excellent job.

Unfortunately, mental health provision for youths experiencing problems is not always accessible.

"Youth in general are less likely to discuss sexual problems of any sort with their family GP. It is a lot to expect them to have the maturity to self-refer to a psychiatric institution. And, from my own research, a psychiatrist charges about \$300 an hour."

Therefore, with enough money from the public sector and Government and/or private enterprises and individuals, the Bright Light Project would like to subsidise a number of visits to mental healthcare provided under the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists.



Charles McArthur says one of his charity's objectives will be to reform the way sex education is taught in schools  
GARRY BRANDON

He would like people in the Bright Light Project to talk and hold seminars at schools, "simply to get students to talk about it. The time for antagonism

has gone. This is about showing our generation that there is acceptance and anyone can be truthful about who they are".

# All work, no play

After the study comes the fun for students, right? Wrong. Amanda Leek finds the doors to the faculty of fun are closing. A cross-campus section of every faculty at the University of Auckland shows post-exam celebrating is the last thing on students' minds this summer

**S**CIENCE: Having handed in his last 4000-word essay this week, Ben Smith arrives for the interview tired. With a Bachelor of Science, a Graduate Diploma in Arts, a TEFL qualification teaching English, experience teaching English in China for six months, and now a post-graduate Diploma in Science, the 24-year-old should be entitled to take a break.

But, as early as October 28, his Facebook status said: "Ben Smith is getting his job app on".

"I could have applied for more jobs earlier but it is time-consuming to do it right. But it doesn't feel like the same hard slog as before exams."

He's optimistic about his options. When he returned from China earlier this year he found Student Job Search had no positions available. Since then, the job market has improved but he is a little concerned about finding something suitable.

"A little bit of partying would be nice, sure. But considering post-graduate study and employment comes first. It has to."

A \$40 administration fee will be introduced next year to be added to the unpaid student loan each year.

**Medical and Health Science:** Alex Stonehouse, 22, has finished his post-graduate Diploma in Health Science and doesn't think life after university is fun.

"It's scary. I've applied for 11 jobs just in the last week. I keep getting turned down, for jobs that I am qualified for, to be told I have no experience. I'm just afraid I'm going to be here months from now, still waiting for someone to actually look at my CV and talk to me. What is the point of spending four years at university only to be told you have wasted your time?"

**Law:** Law and arts student Charles McArthur, 19, has concluded his first year. Is the first year the most fun?

"I will be having very little fun indeed. I'm working full-time all summer to finance a trip to South America."

**Engineering:** For Emily Hargrave-Thomas, 22, her Bachelor in Biomedical Engineering is the start. She is doing a 400-hour research scholarship



over summer, full-time work, and post-graduate study overseas. The bonus of finishing exams? "I can go over to friends' places and not worry about work not getting done."

**National Institute of Creative Arts and Industries:** Lydia Wells, 22, is close to finishing her Bachelor in Film, Television, Media Studies and Dance studies. She is looking forward to four summer months of fun and friends. She set up her production company, Ladder Productions, when there were no jobs this year.

**Business School:** Prathik Balakrishna, 20, has completed a

Bachelor of Commerce. His plan is to achieve honours. "While I'll be working in my chosen field over summer, I think I need at least one more year of university before I can fully commit. Having said that, it's a great feeling to know I can officially graduate and be considered an adult of sorts. It opens up whole new avenues and that does excite me."

**Arts:** Bachelor of English and Classical Studies student Briar Lawry, 21, is done with exams. "Fun will probably continue to be a foreign concept for me, what with retail work over the summer months in order to make some kind of money. The BA as a stand-alone degree

isn't of huge use. I'm more likely to look into postgraduate teaching or journalism, although I haven't entirely discounted a Masters in Creative Writing."

For Melanie Govender, 23, a bachelor's degree, majoring in psychology, with honours, doesn't so much open avenues but lead to dead ends for "critical thinkers".

"It looks pretty bleak. My degree will get me nowhere — or rather not where I want to go."

"Why did I study for all those years? For a massive student loan and pieces of parchment?"