



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

Wednesday, 29 January 2025

# **The Y Marches in Mardi Gras 2025 With and for Young People**

Y Australia is marching in Mardi Gras 2025, led by Y NSW and is proud to support and participate in this iconic event.

The 2025 Mardi Gras theme 'Free to Be' is a chance for the Australian LGBTIQ+ community, and queer young people to express the freedom to be as they are: queer, proud and powerful.

Eighty staff, volunteers, members and carers will march in Y merchandise, wearing Y t-shirts and glow-in-the-dark capes. Our march will feature young people from the Y dressed as proud and powerful superheroes who are Free to Be their true, out and proud selves.

Our entry to the march is titled "A Freer Future: Why Not Be Me? Queer Young People are Powerful!" and was developed for and by queer young people.

Our theme is built on the premise that queer young people deserve to express themselves authentically and live happily and without fear.

It embodies the ideal that everyone should feel empowered to be true to themselves and express their individuality without reservation and therein lies great power.

Ys from across Australia are marching to champion belonging, inclusivity and the rights of queer people. Mardi Gras also gives us the opportunity to look at the work still to do in achieving full rights and acceptance of the queer community.

Y Australia recently made a shift from the YMCA to the Y to be more inclusive of diverse peoples. Our staff, volunteers and communities work together to support young people and promote inclusion, openness and diversity.

Because the Y is a place for every Australian. Our commitment is that no matter your creed, colour or sexuality - everyone can belong and feel safe at the Y.

Many YMCAs have been a haven for the queer community such as in the United States. Yet, in the past, in places like Denver, the YMCA responded to this need for connection and belonging with practices that are discriminatory.

We're proud to say that we do not tolerate, excuse or accept discriminative practices at Y Australia.

We are an inclusive, diverse and equitable workplace. We are part of a Movement which strives to be open and inclusive of all people regardless of their ability, age, culture, ethnicity, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation and socio-economic background.



The World Alliance of the YMCA's endorsed this view some years ago and Y Australia wholeheartedly supports this, as it will help us deliver a Just World as part of our Vision 2030.

**Quote attributable to Alexandra Ash, CEO Y Australia**

“Y Australia is unwavering in our commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion. We support all young people to be free to be themselves – that’s why we’re proud to march in Mardi Gras this year – for our staff, our volunteers and our communities.”

**Quote attributable to Rob Kennaugh, CEO Y NSW**

“This national expression of our Y values is something we’re very proud of. For all our young people, and those who support them, ‘Free to Be’ is an important message all young people need to hear – because everyone should be free to be themselves at the Y and beyond.’