

# Fiona

## VincentCare Victoria Staff Member

### LGBTIQ Case Vignette



As a member of the LGBTIQ+ community and a Catholic, I would like to say that before I started at VincentCare my faith in the Catholic Church was waning. I felt embarrassed and rejected by a faith that I have belonged to my whole life and that my family believe in deeply. This caused friction and conflict with my immediate and extended family all of whom are devout Catholics.

My immediate family are loving and accepting and they did not discriminate against me or my partner, but my faith did. As I did not feel accepted, I did not attend church, which my mother in particular struggled with.

A few years ago, she became extremely unwell and, instead of concentrating on her own recovery, she made herself sick with worry at the thought that her lesbian daughter would not be joining her in heaven when the time came. She knows me as a kind, caring and generous daughter and she loves me dearly, but this anxiety had a significant negative impact on her mental health.

This was exacerbated by the extremism of the Marriage Equality Postal Survey which enabled the public voicing of horrible and harmful comments. Politicians, religious leaders – the hierarchy of the Catholic Church – and the general public, all used faith as an excuse to be vile towards the LGBTIQ+ community.

The debate had a really awful impact on my relationship with my family, especially my uncle who was one of my biggest fans. Because his faith told him that LGBTIQ+ people did not deserve to be happy as they were an abomination, he voted No to marriage equality. I still do not feel safe or accepted in the wider Catholic community, and the fear that this proposed religious discrimination bill provokes in me and others in my community, is palpable.

Where I do feel safe and accepted however is here at VincentCare. I have felt nothing but warmth and acceptance from the first minute I arrived for my interview. Because of my experiences with the Catholic Church and other faith-based organisations, I never thought I would apply for a job at VincentCare, even though I had been interested in several roles that I had seen previously advertised.

The fact that VincentCare had a specific LGBTIQ+ role is the only reason I applied, and I am so happy that I did. VincentCare has gone above and beyond to ensure that not only LGBTIQ+ staff and clients are accepted here, but all people from all faiths and cultural backgrounds. This makes me enormously proud to be part of this organisation.

I would like to see VincentCare playing a greater role in advocating against the proposed bill, and in fighting for the rights of people like me who just want to be able to love whomever we choose and live happy and content lives.

When I became aware that Vinnies had taken a public stand against discrimination recently, it blew my mind. It reiterated the feelings of acceptance I have felt working in this organisation. I already felt proud to work for VincentCare, but to know that the acceptance for LGBTIQ+ people extends to the greater organisation of St Vincent de Paul/Vinnies, and that they were willing to announce that acceptance in such a public way was amazing.

To know that VincentCare and the Society of St Vincent de Paul – both Catholic organisations – are defending the LGBTIQ+ community is fantastic. It makes me feel like I have chosen the right organisation to work with, and gives me more strength to be an advocate for those who do not feel like they have a say and feel rejected by their faith. I also think Vinnies and VincentCare have a role to play in encouraging other faith-based organisations to provide more inclusive services and safe workplaces for people who identify as LGBTIQ+.

My family is the most loving, caring and generous that I know, and I often take inspiration from them. They are the reason that I do the work that I do. My family is proud of my successes and is proud that I work for a Catholic organisation. It has helped alleviate the guilt my mother feels as she sees that I am an accepted and valued member of VincentCare. My Grandparents were both volunteers with St Vincent de Paul when I was a child and working at VincentCare makes me feel a closer connection to them, even though they have both passed.

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