

LGBT parenting meeting 31st July 2006, Edinburgh

Equality Network, 30 Bernard Street, Edinburgh EH6 6PR
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Present: Rebekah Sartre and Stacey Powch (Rainbow Families), Maria Tillmann (Rainbow Families and Edinburgh Lesbian Mothers Group), Sue Robertson (Lesbian Mothers Scotland and Edinburgh Lesbian Mothers Group), Maria Henderson (Rainbow Families Highland), Sara Aboud (LGBT Youth Scotland), Ewan Jeffrey (Gay Dads Scotland), Lucinda Broadbent and Louise Scott (Media Co-op), Sarah Gamble and Tim Hopkins (Equality Network)

Introduction to LGBT Families Media Package

Lucinda and Louise gave an introduction to the proposed LGBT Families Media Package – see separate paper. Media Co-op's overall aim is film work around social change. This includes getting useful stories into the mainstream media, and producing non-broadcast media materials on issues. They worked with Scottish Women's Aid on the 'Listen Louder' project about children living in refuges for women, which is used for training the police and others.

The question was raised whether the news media would use such material on LGBT families, and if they did, would they alter it, e.g. change the soundtrack. The response was that the TV news are short of film material, so will use good material if provided. They might put on a different voice-over.

Can the package refer to existing good material, eg the Archers storyline of two gay men and a baby? It was noted that Media Co-op would network within the media to find supportive contacts.

Funding was raised. Media Co-op have not started to look at funding yet.

The question was raised whether it is right for mums and dads to agree to their children appearing in such material, for distribution. Is it fair to politicise children in this way? It was noted that the material can be produced so that the children cannot be identified, and there is a

possibility of using child actors. It was noted that some LGBT parents have grown-up children who might want to be involved, and their appearance could be very powerful.

Media training was raised, and it was noted that the Equality Network is organising a free weekend's media training, probably in November. One example of good practice here is the SAMH 'see me' media pack and training resource. SAMH also did media training for young people, and LGBT Youth are looking at doing something similar

(There was further discussion of the media package later – see page 4)

Obstacles faced by LGBT parents

Homophobia.

Resourcing – eg Glasgow Lesbian Mothers Group has fallen away – there's no resource to network and provide support across Scotland, or locally.

Lack of donated sperm.

Discrimination in adoption law.

Discrimination by social workers.

Lack of information on how to safely use privately donated sperm.

Lack of network for gay men and lesbian women wanting to have children together.

Lack of public images of LGBT parents: should be in libraries, nurseries, etc. Bookshops have L&G sections, so why not libraries?

Media representation. It was noted that there will often be bad press for LGBT positive work, but that should not stop us doing it. Groups are always getting asked for an LGBT family to appear on TV, eg in the news, but that is not usually appropriate. Then there may be questions about who does get to represent us. Some media coverage is good: eg the Press and Journal piece on the Adoption Bill evidence session.

Religious intolerance.

Institutional memory of homophobia within LGBT people – people assume there will be homophobia, for example by schools, and often the reality is better.

Lack of legal protection for families, and the fact that discrimination is legal.

Difficulty in enforcing rights of contact with one's children.

What is lacking in services?

Visibility.

Health visitors and doctors discriminate against co-parents. There are issues around being out to, for example, doctors. Service providers like doctors make incorrect assumptions, for example asking people they know to be lesbian what birth control they are using.

The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act needs amended to recognise the partner of a woman receiving fertility treatment as the child's other mother, and to give her parental rights and responsibilities.

Where can the straight parent get support if the other parent comes out as LGBT? Do groups like PFLAG cover this? It would be better if this support was provided by a broader 'family of LGBT people' support group rather than a specialist 'straight partners' support group which might end up being rather negative.

Who supports the children of LGBT parents? Does LGBT Youth do this? There is a group in Dundee that does this, through the '18 and under' organisation, but there was a question about its quality – it is called 'DV8'.

There is a US website called 'Colage' who provide this kind of support, and they also produce a DVD.

Changes we'd like to see in the next few years

Both mothers' names being on the birth certificate, whether the pregnancy is through a fertility clinic or privately arranged.

Binding arrangements with the sperm donor, whether to give him parental rights and responsibilities where agreed, or to agree that he will not have them.

Fewer groups questioning our right to exist. Reduce religious homophobia.

Homophobia added to hate crimes.

Resourced support networks for parents, children, and ex-partners.

Better training of social workers, especially in the west, and consistency of treatment by social workers. It's the luck of the draw whether you get a good one at present.

Proper implementation of the equality policies of service providers.

Adoption agencies treating people the same – at present even if they will deal with a same-sex couple, you get second class treatment – eg told you will get the 'most difficult' children.

Resource lists signposting to good schools, adoptions agencies, social workers, doctors, companies etc. It was noted that Stonewall's Diversity Champions programme signposts to good employers. Beyond Barriers had some other resource lists – are these still available?

Better networking between people and between groups.

Better sexual health services – Glasgow is good; Edinburgh a lot less good.

Scotsgay magazine gives a poor impression of LGBT people – people don't want their children to see the contents.

Why is there no LGBT Centre in Edinburgh that is used as a community resource? Also in Inverness – Reach Out Highland provides some support, but is not a community centre.

Lobbying for NHS funding to overcome the sperm donation shortage.

Resources: Scotland needs someone to help groups get resources and funding. Training for groups is not enough – often they know how to apply for funding, but don't have the people/time to do it.

It would be beneficial if the parenting groups could meet say twice a year.

Sharing facilities, eg a photocopier in Edinburgh, would also be useful. More networking between local LGBT groups.

Beyond Barriers used to provide good information – the directory for example. However, the support available from them was varied – less in the east. They were good on networking individuals, but less good on capacity building. We should learn from the Beyond Barriers project and look at what is needed for the future.

There could be a strategic workshop to look at coordination and to drive forward the LGBT sector in a cohesive way.

What is important in the LGBT Families Media Package?

The proposal is right to include consultation with LGBT family groups, but driven by Media Co-op's vision.

It was suggested that there should be a focus on the mainstream media, and that the training side is ancillary. Visibility in the media would have a big effect. We need to get across that LGBT families are just ordinary families.

It was noted that it is possible for people's views to change in surprising ways – eg the apparent support for immigration to Scotland from the EU.

On the specific question of the Steering Group for the project, it was agreed that Media Co-op will come up with some ideas for the project and circulate them to people at this meeting. They will speak first with people who work in the news media, and also service providers who might use training materials.

The support that would be welcome from the groups present today would be help in finding families to be involved, ideas for targets for the resources, and making sure that the right topics are included. We're not

talking about monthly meetings! The groups present expressed their interest in potentially being involved.