



# FFLAG

Supporting families and our  
LGBT+ loved ones with pride

# NEWSLETTER

## December 2021



***Jenny Broughton MBE, President of FFLAG (she/her) was unwell at the time of our last newsletter but we are delighted she is feeling better, and well enough to write her usual introduction.***

In our spring newsletter we were all looking forward to attending the Pride events scheduled for the summer months. This was particularly the case because they had mostly been cancelled in 2020. Another lockdown, and the continuing difficulties of meeting in large groups, meant our hopes were largely dashed. Sadly, we were unable to show our support for our LGBT+ children in the very special way that Prides allow. I was therefore delighted to hear that, late last month, FFLAG parents were able to attend Trans Pride South West in Bristol. I'm even prouder that we launched our latest support booklet, "*How do I tell my children? I'm transgender*" at that event.

Since the end of the last lockdown many local groups have been able to hold meetings in person once again. Many groups are offering a hybrid combination of online and face to face meetings. Reports from seven of the local groups can be found in these pages. On behalf of FFLAG, I thank all the parents who have kept the families in their area supported through such difficult times, whether by telephone, Zoom or socially distanced in-person meetings.

Building on what FFLAG has learned from the groups that have been holding online meetings, the trustees have decided to offer a monthly Zoom support meeting that is open to parents from anywhere in the UK. This meeting will be facilitated jointly with FFLAG Bristol. I am delighted by this decision. We know the value parents put on the support local groups offer, because they tell us. However, attendance at such groups is not an option for many simply because of geography. FFLAG's helpline receives calls from all over the UK and we now have something to offer parents who live far away from an existing support group or whose circumstances prevent them attending in person.

I wish you all the compliments of the season and I hope we can all have our families and friends around us as the second year of this pandemic draws to a close. Despite news of new and more infectious variants I am still hopeful that in 2022 we can meet, at Pride events up and down the country, supporting families and our LGBT+ loved ones with pride.

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**Click on these links to go direct to an article, or scroll down to get the whole Newsletter**

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**An overview of some of FFLAG's activities from Hugh Fell (he/him), the Chair FFLAG's Board of Trustees**

As I write this update, FFLAG is preparing its submission to the UK Government on its proposals for banning conversion “therapy”. These proposals were originally promised in 2018 and despite the length of time it has taken to produce them we believe there are some significant omissions that we wish to see remedied. This is an important piece of legislation protecting all LGBT+ individuals (and children in particular) from lasting psychological harm and we welcome the government’s commitment to producing legislation early next year.

We know that the booklets we produce on a range of topics around family relations with LGBT+ members are hugely popular. Downloads from our website run into thousands. We have reprinted many of the booklets several times. We recently received an email from a teacher who had requested copies of “How do I tell my parents I am .....

*Thank you again for delivering the booklets to school. They are now in both our pastoral offices and the pastoral staff have been briefed on how to use them with students and families. We also discussed and distributed them in LGBTQ+ today. The students were thrilled and mentioned how useful they were to have before Christmas, something I hadn't even considered but of course the holidays are such a tricky time for LGBT+ people as you meet with wider family who can hold all sorts of views, the delivery was really perfect timing!*

In our last newsletter I wrote about the launch of our booklet “*When someone you love is diagnosed with HIV*”, explaining the good news that HIV infection is now a treatable condition, and dealing with the natural concerns of families and friends for their loved one. In this newsletter, we focus on the launch of our latest booklet: “*How do I tell my children? I'm transgender*”, a truly wonderful and practical resource for transgender parents.

“*How do I tell my children? I'm transgender*” springs from the desire that underpins all our work to help other families find the best way through a potentially difficult disclosure. This project was led by FFLAG's Vice-Chair, Sarah Furley, in collaboration with trans parents whom we were able to contact thanks to help from our partner organisations. The many quotes from parents and their children's (often wry!) responses contained in our booklet bring into vivid focus the key things to consider when coming out to your child. You can read more about the genesis of this booklet [here](#).

Elsewhere in this newsletter you will be able to read comments from some of the HIV consultants who now offer their patients copies of “[When someone you love is diagnosed with HIV](#)” to give to their families. The importance of family support to ensure adherence to the treatments that enable the virus to be fully suppressed is one of the key reasons they find our booklet so valuable. As we begin preparations to print a revised second edition, I salute the dedication of the parents who helped us produce both these booklets. Their desire to help others through the situations they had to face, without the support we can now offer, is truly inspiring.

Virgin Money Giving, our online donations intermediary, ceased operation on 30<sup>th</sup> November. After considering many alternatives, FFLAG chose Give As You Live as the replacement because, in addition to handling [donations directly from our website](#), they also offer our supporters the opportunity to [create fundraising events](#) and to nominate FFLAG to [receive a percentage of retailers' profit margins](#) when they shop online or in store. Please look at these ways of helping us, especially the last one, as this is a free way to help FFLAG financially.

Finally, as we look ahead to next year, FFLAG is planning to launch a new one-to-one support service. We will be offering this via an online platform being constructed for us *pro bono* by IT employees of JP Morgan Chase, the multinational investment bank. It will enable anybody seeking our support to select a volunteer from a gallery of anonymised biographies and schedule a timeslot when they are both available to speak. Crucially, no personal contact details will be exchanged, and the call will be made through a one-time internet connection. We believe this platform will enable us to recruit more parents to help deal with requests for support because they can control their time commitment and have the confidence of knowing that callers have chosen to speak with them because of their personal experience. The biography would disclose if our volunteer is the parent of a L,G,B,T or HIV+ child and whatever other details they consider relevant such as faith, languages spoken, the community they belong to. We believe this will relieve pressure on our Helpline and email support services (both of which will continue to be offered) as well as provide a service tailored to each caller's needs. There will be more about this project in our next newsletter!

Whatever 2022 has in store for us, FFLAG will continue to strive for fairness and acceptance of our LGBT+ loved ones in their families, workplaces and society in general. Thank you for supporting us.



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### FFLAG's latest booklet: 'How Do I Tell my Children? – I'm Transgender'

FFLAG is delighted we were able to publish our latest booklet '*How Do I Tell my Children? – I'm Transgender*' during Trans Awareness Week 2021. The booklet was launched on FFLAG's stall at Trans Pride South West's Community Day in Bristol on 20 November 2021 and is now available to download from FFLAG's website.

The creation of '*How Do I Tell My Children?*' was prompted by an increasing number of requests for support from trans parents who wanted to break the news of their transition to their children. It joins the family of FFLAG booklets, '*How Do I Tell My Parents?*' and '*A Guide for Family and Friends*' which are available in LGB and T versions.



All FFLAG's booklets are written from personal experience and for '*How Do I Tell my Children?*' we collaborated with trans parents who generously shared their experiences with us. The booklet is packed with quotes describing how contributors explained their transition to their children.

As Bobbi Pickard, from Trans in the City, says:

"Luckily, as we can see from many of the wonderful quotes in this booklet there can be - and usually is with time - acceptance and in many cases that acceptance is gloriously absolute. Personally, I think that's because exactly the thing that makes us so anxious about telling our children - love - is the thing that carries us across so many seemingly stormy waters."



***Last year, FFLAG launched our booklet, “When someone you love is diagnosed with HIV”. Reaction has been incredibly positive and we have a couple of insights on just how well it has been received.***

***Firstly, Janice Fakes (she/her) was one of the authors of the booklet. She has written to us about some of the impact the booklet is having.***

After my son Gary was diagnosed HIV+ I was shocked, frightened and unsupported. I felt quite alone as I dealt with the news and could only watch as he went through the early stages of having his treatment adjusted to his needs. After contacting Janet and Bruce at FFLAG they introduced me to Hatta Hodson and together we wrote the FFLAG booklet “When Someone You Love is Diagnosed with HIV”.

Gary gave some copies of the HIV booklet, along with the other FFLAG booklets, to his Sexual Health/HIV clinic, which were very positively received. When it is appropriate, the clinic now gives booklets, or shares the link to the FFLAG site, to patients when they are initially diagnosed.

One of the consultants from Gary’s sexual health/HIV clinic invited Gary and I to go with her to a school as part of its Year 8 pupils’ sex education to talk about growing up being LGBT+ and being diagnosed and living with HIV. The Year 8 class was mixed gender and I felt so impressed as they all showed great maturity and respect throughout our time with them.

I’m old enough to be their grandmother, so it’s been many years since I’ve spent time with school-aged children. I was reminded how refreshing and open minded they are. They listened and asked well thought out questions - such as “can you still die from AIDS?” and “can you give HIV to your baby when you’re pregnant?”

Indeed Gary felt heartened that sex education is much more diverse and inclusive than when he was in Year 8, about 20 years ago. All the pupils showed great support and understanding for the LGBT+ community.

For my own part, talking to the class about how I felt when Gary told me he was HIV, unexpectedly stirred up emotions for me. I felt my voice wobble as I talked about the 1980’s HIV and AIDS government campaign warning of certain death, and the dreadful stigma that continues today as a dark and frightening legacy from that time. I explained how much it influenced my reaction to Gary’s diagnosis in much more recent times.

This experience has reinforced for me the real need for a new campaign informing everyone of the true up to date facts about HIV - and finally pushing the dreadful outdated misinformation of the 1980’s into the history books where it belongs.

Speaking to the pupils and sharing the FFLAG HIV booklet is my small contribution to helping to redress the balance. I’m greatly encouraged by the time I spent with the children, plus the positivity from the incredible Sexual Health/HIV team who are working so hard to look after my son alongside their other patients, and also educating future generations.

***Secondly we have had reaction direct from two NHS consultants:***

**From Dr L a Consultant in Sexual Health**

*“This is fantastic news and absolutely vital work. Especially with the results of the last knowledge and attitudes about HIV survey in 2014.*

*Our HIV team leader is also very enthusiastic about this by the way and will be looking to share the link to it by QR code with our other service locations.*

*Thank you for this. It really will positively affect so many people's lives and help bolster the social support that they often lack at times of a new diagnosis. This is one of the best ways to fight stigma.*

*So thank you, for all our patients' families and future generations. This is in no way overstating things."*

### **From Dr P a Consultant in Sexual Health and HIV**

*"As a consultant looking after people living with HIV, I am able to reassure my patients about effective treatments, stopping transmission and long life expectancies but often their more acute worries are of how their family and friends will take their diagnosis. The FFLAG 'When someone you love has HIV' booklet provides reassurance to families from others that have been through the same experience and is priceless to our patients and their loved ones. That experience is something that we as clinicians are often unable to provide. It has become a valued resource for us to use during the first weeks of a new HIV diagnosis."*

### **What next?**

We are currently working on a 2nd edition that we expect to print next Spring. We hope to find sufficient resources to deliver copies to every Sexual Health Clinic and GP practice in the UK. This little booklet has the power to transform the emotions of every family affected by HIV in very beneficial ways. Whilst copies can always be downloaded from our website, being able to give a physical copy to a family member who may be in shock to read when they are ready to do so is especially important.

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***Des Johnson (he/him), one of the parents at Bristol FFLAG wrote a great blog post for their son's school. With his permission, we reproduce it below.***

### **Pride Month – Parents reflect and share their story**

*To support Pride Month, the parents of one of our pupils have shared their story and reflected on their experience. We wanted to share this with you, and if it prompts any questions, or issues that you would like to discuss, please do not hesitate to get in touch with the school*

Four years ago our eldest son came out to us as gay. Never for a second did it change the way we loved our son but our heads filled with questions and concerns. How will the rest of our family and friends react? Will this affect his life chances in work and in relationships? Will we ever have grandkids? Questions that we couldn't answer on our own.

That's when my wife found FFLAG (Friends & Families of Lesbians and Gays) – a small charity with local groups of parents, all of whom had gay, lesbian or trans kids, all of whom had been on their own journey through this process of being a parent of an LGBTQ+ child. That was just over 3 ½ years ago and since then we have learned so much about ourselves, about our son, and how to navigate some of the complexities that him being gay brings. These insights have helped us and so we wanted to share a few of our biggest learnings in case they might help you too.

Your child coming out makes you realise just how many false and unfounded assumptions you make about your kids and the life they will lead. We assumed he was straight. We assumed he would have girlfriends who would become a wife and then Mother to our grandkids. Some of that may still happen but just with a same-sex partner. Because of those assumptions, part of the process for parents can be grieving for the life you imagined they



were going to have but that is now gone. Of course, it was never reality, always just your imagination, but you have to let go and imagine a different future now. But the huge upside that one of the other parents said to us is that “now you know who he really is”. And it’s true – the trust and transparency between us has grown and we are so thankful that our son felt able to come out to us when he did rather than having to keep hiding his true self.

The other common misunderstanding for parents can be that you start to question whether your child being LGBTQ+ is because of something you did or did not do. The simple truth is that your child has always been gay, or trans, or bi ... you just didn’t know it. There’s no point trying to look for reasons or causes – accept it as your child’s reality that you are now aware of, and put your focus into supporting and loving them because they sadly will face challenges and prejudice along the way. They need you “in their corner”, not questioning why they are who they are.

Our final reflection is that ironically, as our son came out of his “closet”, we actually created one of our own as his parents. We still have too many friends that we haven’t “come out” to as parents of a gay kid. Partly it’s because we fear that they will react badly and we won’t know how to react to them in return, and partly it’s because we realise that sometimes it really isn’t a big deal. We never went round proactively telling people we thought our son was straight so why start broadcasting the fact he’s gay? But we are proud, deeply proud, of our son and the young man he is becoming, and slowly but surely we are now coming out of our self-imposed closet and sharing with friends and family who he really is.

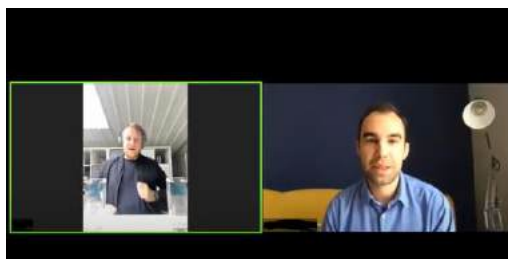
We know that we aren’t the only parents to an LGBTQ+ kid at Abingdon School, and we’re probably not the only ones that have struggled a bit along the way, so if this sounds like you, or might be you in the future, the people that helped us might help you. You can find out more about FFLAG and their support resources and guides at [www.fflag.org.uk](http://www.fflag.org.uk). Happy Pride Month 2021!



***FFLAG is looking for a project manager. We would call it a “volunteer project manager” but that is confusing because it is a paid role.***

As mentioned elsewhere, FFLAG is planning to implement an online platform next year to supplement our Helpline and email support services. We need someone to manage the set-up and implementation.

The aim of this new platform is to make it easier for anybody seeking support from FFLAG to connect with a FFLAG parent volunteer whose experiences of parenting a LGBT+ child are closest to theirs, whether in terms of faith, the sexuality, sex or gender identity of their child, or the traditions of their community. We hope it will also enable us to offer support in other languages. We believe this approach will help us to recruit volunteer parents for the platform because the time commitment offered will be entirely within each volunteer’s control.



To fulfil our aim of offering support to all kinds of families, FFLAG needs to recruit many more parents from more diverse backgrounds and support them appropriately. We are seeking to recruit someone to set up a volunteering programme and then to run it for us. This might be two different people, or it could be that the same person is qualified to set up the volunteering programme and to run it.

We are looking to recruit a highly organised and approachable person to lead on the development of FFLAG’s recruitment and coordination of volunteers. While many skills and attributes are important to this post there are two that are vital. The candidate must have:

- **experience of, and empathy with, the LGBT+ community**
- **previous experience of recruiting and coordinating volunteers**

As FFLAG has no premises, the Volunteer Coordinator will be home based but there will be an occasional requirement to attend meetings and events for which a travel allowance will be payable. The set-up stage will run on a project basis and once that project has been delivered, we envisage the role requiring 15 hours per week, which can be arranged flexibly to suit the candidate.

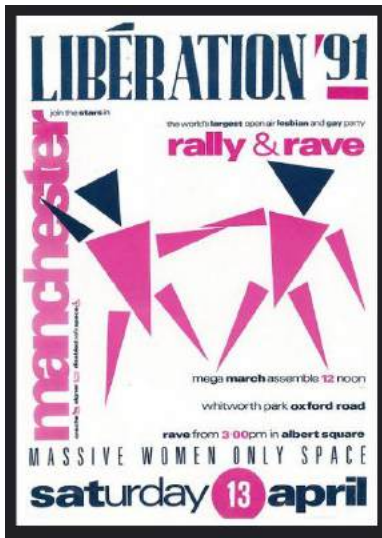
If you know somebody who might be interested in finding out more about setting up and/or running our volunteering scheme, please ask them to email [comms@fflag.org.uk](mailto:comms@fflag.org.uk) for a recruitment pack.

**The closing date for receipt of applications is Sunday 23rd January so please contact anyone you know as soon as possible**



**Normally our newsletter editor is anonymous to our readers. However, when Ken Batty (he/him) was searching through some old papers at his home he found a letter which he thought was very relevant for the newsletter. He explains what it was all about.**

You only need to attend a Pride March to see the reaction FFLAG get: cheers, applause and huge smiles. Family acceptance is hugely important to LGBT+. For parents, and other family members, to march in support is amazing. I think that is why I have always thought FFLAG was a great idea. In recent years. I have been happy to produce the newsletter and do anything else I can to show support. A few months ago I found a file that made me proud to realise I had been involved in doing even more.



In 1991 the government, not content with Section 28 on the statute books, proposed some additional anti-gay legislation. They wanted to make it illegal for lesbians and gay men to foster or adopt. Bi and trans were not big subjects of conversation then – the focus was just on the L and the G.

A group of us in Manchester go together and decided that we should hold a huge protest rally. We had seen just how many people had turned out in Manchester to protest against Section 28. Maybe we could repeat that success. I do not think any of us thought we would foster or adopt. Rather it was a determination to stand up to a government that seemed to want to attack us at every opportunity.

We organised "Liberation '91" a huge rally in Manchester at which, among others, FFLAG's patron Michael Cashman spoke. I was one of the main organisers. I remember speaking on a stage in front of

Manchester Town Hall to around 15,000 people. We were angry and upset, but it still had the feel of a huge party and it was a tremendous celebration

A couple of weeks after the event we were approached by Jimmy Somerville, the pop singer, then at the height of his fame. "Could he do a benefit concert for us at the Roundhouse in Camden?" We were delighted and a group of us went down there on the day. We took all the left over merchandise we had – Liberation '91 stickers, posters and over 100 tee-shirts. He invited one of the group to speak on the stage and Jimmy wore one of our tee-shirts in the second half of his show. We sold everything and I remember selling the shirt I was wearing for £20 to someone who was determined to have one.



We ended up raising so much money we paid off the costs of the event and had money left over. We decided that we would use it to fund groups who wanted to make a difference for lesbians and gay men. This was thirty years ago, I had long forgotten what we did with the money when I was tidying up a box of old papers and came across my Liberation '91 folder. There was copies of minutes, a few bank statements, endless lists of people who had signed in at meetings with their name, address and phone number – nobody had email in those days. I also found a letter which had been sent to me and I have copied it here.



# family pride

FAMILY PRIDE  
ORGANISATION  
Honorary Joint  
Co-ordinators  
Joyce Layland  
17 Croydon Avenue  
Royton Oldham  
OL2 5YE  
(061-678-6884)  
Alan Dickens  
15 Kingsley Road  
Adel Leeds  
LS16 7NZ  
(0532-674627)

4th June, 1991

Ken,  
LIBERATION 91,  
c/o The Gay Centre,  
MANCHESTER.

629  
7621

Dear Ken,

Further to our Meeting with Liberation 91 at the Town Hall last Wednesday, we are extremely grateful for your offer of help in providing £800 - without conditions - to enable us to get together as parents (hopefully in September in Leicester) to discuss at length and in detail all the issues surrounding the proposed setting up of Family Pride.

However, we would not wish the Leicester Parents' Group to make any arrangements until the money is ratified by Liberation 91 Finance Committee and in our Account with the Leeds & Holbeck Building Society.

If you could arrange to let me have a cheque made out to 'LEEDS & HOLBECK BUILDING SOCIETY' I will personally let Leicester Group know and they can then go ahead with more definite planning.

We look forward to hearing from you and thank you once again for thinking about us in such a positive way.

Yours in support,

ALAN DICKENS

copies sent to:  
F and B - Leicester  
J-P, F,  
J-MPG,  
R-P, E,  
R/A-Sh,  
J-Ex,  
J/G-K.

AFFILIATED  
ORGANISATIONS  
Manchester  
Parents Group  
(061-274-3814)  
Parent Contact  
Shrewsbury  
(0743-4479)  
Parents' Friend  
Leeds  
(0533-674627)  
Leicester Parents  
Group  
(0533-708331)  
Acceptance Kent  
(0795-661463)

FAMILY PRIDE IS THE NATIONAL ORGANISATION OF GROUPS FOR PARENTS, FAMILIES AND FRIENDS OF LESBIANS AND GAY MEN

The parents had their meeting. It was a great success. They decided not to call the group they set up Family Pride but rather they looked at their US counterpart. The US group is called PFLAG – Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. Someone must have pointed out that they wanted all the family involved because the UK group was called Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. FFLAG. It turns out that 30 years ago I was instrumental in giving £800 of our funds to enable the meeting to take place that founded FFLAG. And here I am, editing the newsletter after all that time. I feel almost as proud as the mums and dads who march at Pride each year.



**When a Gwent Police Community Support Officer set up an LGBTQ+ get together in Caerphilly some of the group from FFLAG South Wales went along. Hilary Beynon (she/her) sent us a report.**

FFLAG South Wales was pleased to attend the first meeting of the “LGBTQ+ Get Together” on the 10<sup>th</sup> November in Caerphilly. It was an excellent opportunity to talk about the work of FFLAG and to leave our contact details and information booklets. The project is the brainchild of Rhiannon Collins, Police Community Support Officer in the Caerphilly area.

*“I have launched an engagement in Caerphilly for the LGBTQ+ Community. Each month we are holding an “LGBTQ+ Get Together”, which is to create a safe, inclusive space in which people can talk openly about their community. The group aims to provide a safe space for local LGBTQ+ people, allies and the community to learn, share and provide support for the LGBTQ+ community in Gwent.”*

The introduction of the community hub follows the recent launch of an all-Wales LGBT+ police network, where staff and officers from Gwent, South Wales, Dyfed and North Wales work in partnership with police and crime commissioners to ensure that the policies, practices and facilities of police services in Wales are supportive of LGBT+ officers, staff and volunteers.

The group is set to meet monthly in Coffi Vista, Caerphilly, CF83 1JL. For details about the next meeting drop an email to: Rhiannon.Collins@gwent.police.uk



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### **Introducing The Rainbow Lottery**

Over the 5 years from March 2016 to March 2020, FFLAG has depended almost entirely upon the generosity of individual donors. The average total income from donors we received in each year of this period was £6,766.

In the last financial year, the trustees embarked upon a plan to broaden our sources of income, recognising that our annual expenditure would need to increase substantially if we were to implement our future plans.

One new source of income is The Rainbow Lottery. This is run by a community interest company for the benefit of LGBT+ charities. In the eight months we have been selling tickets we have received £543 from this source. If you fancy a flutter why not give it a go. The top prize is **£25,000** and a ticket costs just £1 a week, of which 60p will go directly to good causes. If you buy your tickets and nominate FFLAG as your chosen charity, we receive 50p for each ticket sold and the other 10p goes into the Community Fund for distribution to other LGBT+ charities.



FFLAG currently has 14 supporters regularly buying lottery tickets. Please consider having a festive flutter by visiting <https://www.rainbowlottery.co.uk/support/fflag>.



**FFLAG and FFLAG Bristol go nationwide with their offer of a Zoom meeting to parents from anywhere.**

The mums and dads at FFLAG Bristol have been holding regular monthly meetings on Zoom throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. Although face-to-face meetings have become possible again, they have continued to hold the monthly Zoom meeting having found that parents from areas without a local parent support group valued being able to join them.

FFLAG is now co-hosting the monthly Zoom meetings with our Bristol affiliate. A FFLAG trustee is present at the meetings, which are totally confidential – nobody is even obliged to turn on their camera.

Wherever you happen to be in the UK, if you, your family or friends need support, reassurance or information and would like to chat with other parents on Zoom, please call Sue or Janet in complete confidence for details of how to attend.



**Sue – 01454 898644**  
**Janet – 01454 528805**



Don't be put off - Christmas attire is not mandatory!





**Janet Kent (she/her) sent us an update on the work of FFLAG Bristol**

This year, despite the challenges of cancelled events, we've had an increase in numbers of parents who have contacted us. Some just wanted to email or have a chat with us. Others have joined the monthly Zoom meeting. The Zoom meetings have gone very well. It's encouraging that people have felt able to talk freely despite being online and we've gone away feeling very connected even though we weren't in the same room.

In September we were able to resume our monthly in-person meetings and moved to a new venue which has turned out to be more accessible for people. It has been encouraging to see that meetings are taking off and we have been able to support some parents of trans children which didn't happen prior to lockdown.

In November, FFLAG Bristol had a presence at Trans Pride South West as it was a local event. It was gratifying for Sue and Bob to be able to support Sarah in the launching of the new booklet, "How do I tell my children? I'm transgender" and there have been some positive links made as a result of that event.

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**Alison Walsh (she/her) from Parents of Jewish Gays and Lesbians sent us a message about the group.**

Like every other group, we have not been able to meet face to face in recent months and we have really missed that. However, finally, as some of the Covid restrictions lift and post the Jewish High Holidays, we have arranged to meet in person and to welcome new members to our home.

If you want to know more, our web page is  
<http://parentsofjewishgaysandlesbians.co.uk/>

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**We have two updates from Families Together London, because, as well as their main group, they have set up FTL-T to support the parents of trans children.**

**Mary Thomas (she/her), one of the team at Families Together London, sent us an update on their recent activities.**

Families Together London (including FTL-T) continued meeting via Zoom during lockdown. We were surprised at how many new people joined us. We were even joined by parents from across Europe too. In many ways we must be thankful that the pandemic allowed us to spread our wings further than we have in the past.

At our first physical meeting back at Battersea in September we were hoping for a bit of a party celebration atmosphere. However, many of the 'old guard' were unable to attend and although we were a smallish group, half of those who turned up were 'newbies' which was a

very pleasant surprise and reinforced the importance of all that we do to support one another. We also had a new member on Zoom at the same time so that was a first.

We are looking forward to welcoming friends old and new at one physical meeting (also with a Zoom connection) and two Zoom meetings each month in the future.

### ***David Wheeler (he/him) sent us an update on the FTL-T group***

Our support group for parents of transgender offspring formed as a subgroup of Families Together London (FTL) at the beginning of 2020. We were already about 6 parents with 4 transgender children, attending FTL meetings before the pandemic. During the first lockdown we started to hold regular monthly Zoom meetings for FTL-T and we formed a WhatsApp group. Our membership has grown over the past 18 months and we are now 41 parents with about 39 transgender offspring who range in age from 11 to 33, in London and elsewhere.

There is clearly a need for support for parents of children and adults who are unhappy with their biological, birth-assigned sex and wish to transition. Their numbers have grown hugely in the past 10 years and have engendered long waiting lists for (currently inadequately provisioned) medical care as well as fierce, polarised public debates about the rights of trans folk, all of which impacts negatively on parents struggling to come to terms with feelings of loss, guilt and worry about their child's decision and future. Hitherto there has been very little support available to parents caught up in this social-medical maelstrom.

Parents come to share with us their sense of grieving for the loss of the child they thought they knew. Of course the same person is still present but there's a sense of "I never expected this"; "are they making the right decision?" and feelings of guilt "what have we as parents done wrong in bringing up our child?" In our group conversations we acknowledge the overriding importance of maintaining a positive supportive relationship with our trans-son or -daughter whilst coping with our own feelings and wanting to give advice and protection. But, as most parents know, young people take advice more readily from others outside of their families, from peers, social media and websites. Their perspective is different from ours.

We worry also about the availability of healthcare that focusses on the needs of transgender youngsters and whether it is also appropriate and proportionate to those needs. The current 3 to 4 year waiting list on the NHS leaves many trans people and their families in limbo unless they can afford private care. Meanwhile there are often other mental health issues that need addressing such as autism, ADHD, anxiety and depression, usually best dealt with separately from the desire to transition. Hopefully, new NHS initiatives, such as the Indigo Gender Service in Greater Manchester, will soon take off to cope with demand.

In our support group we are all at different stages in our coping with change in our offspring. We readily share our experiences whenever that might help someone going through a similar difficult period. We also share whatever information and resources we have found helpful with each other. We also occasionally invite outside speakers, such as my own trans-son who talked about his experience of transitioning. We are a well-knit group engaging with each other in an evolving and positively supportive conversation. We will continue to hold monthly Zoom meetings for FTL-T as well as having access to face to face meetings once a month in Battersea with our parent FTL group. Newcomers are most welcome.



**Jules Taylor (she/her) updated us on her work with FFLAG Cheltenham. She did this before flying off to her lesbian daughter's wedding in Iceland. Congratulations to all the family!**

FFLAG Cheltenham has continued to enjoy being part of the FFLAG Bristol Zoom meetings and having the opportunity to 'meet' with the 'old timers' as well as new parents who are embarking on their journeys.

In May a group of us from FFLAG joined up with Pride Cymru for an opportunity to participate in a talk 'Supporting Families with LGBT+ Loved Ones'- thank you to Hilary and Gian for organising such a great event.



The highlight of the year for me is that FFLAG Cheltenham was able to be 'in person' at Pride in Gloucestershire on the 11th September. What a joy to be at such an event and to see so many people having fun and youngsters feeling safe to be themselves. Somewhat like colourful butterflies emerging from their cocoons! So many fantastic conversations were had and FFLAG Cheltenham was given a slot at 'Speakers Corner' to tell everyone about what FFLAG is, what we do and our aspirations for the future. Some thought provoking questions at the end of my talk and a very worthwhile experience.

I have also had a meeting with the operational lead of a charity Infobuzz in Gloucestershire who offer specialist therapeutic service in the area of mental health, criminal justice and school and community. They were asking advice about how we at FFLAG support transgender youngsters and their families. I think there is going to be an ongoing dialogue. Always good to be networking with various organisations.

That is all the news Cheltenham except to say that I am delighted to add that my wonderful lesbian daughter will be married by the time you get to read this! One proud parent here!





***Lucie Brooke (she/her) the Director & Co-founder of Free2B, a South London group for parents and young people, updated us on their latest activity with parents.***

Our Proud Parents group has remained online throughout the Covid pandemic – getting together every fortnight. We have had fantastic guests joining us to share their personal experiences and professional skills. We were particularly delighted to welcome FFLAG trustee Sarah, who joined us to gain members’ input to inform FFLAG’s campaign work.

This summer, members enjoyed a fabulous family trip to the National Theatre to see “Paradise” by Kae Tempest. It was the first opportunity for members to meet in person all year!

Our lead parent worker, Nicki, was invited by one of our amazing members, to speak at the DLA Piper Conference - Modern Families. Nicki spoke about our Proud Parents group alongside guests covering same sex parenting and HR parenting/adoption policies.

Due to the success of our online sessions we will be continuing with a blended approach operating fortnightly online meetings and in-person sessions once a quarter. We had our first in-person session in September with our famous cheeseboard making a comeback!

We are delighted to be able to launch two new resources to support our youth members. An LGBTQ+ race and faith booklet created by our very own Reena – celebrating intersectional identities! We have also been working with our trans wellbeing group to develop a trans 101 guide. The topics covered are in direct response to issues raised by our members.

To access both resources and more information about our LGBTQ+ youth work, please access our youth webpage: <https://free2b.lgbt/young-people/>

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***Chris Warren (he/him) is Chairperson of New Road Parents, which covers Worcestershire and South Birmingham. He sent us this update.***

At New Road Parents’ Group, we have continued to have socially distanced face to face meetings since the lockdown eased. These have been very well attended. We have had contact from over 10 new sets of parents or carers in the last 4 months.



We attended the first ever Bromsgrove Pride on a rainy day in October. The attendance was fabulous with a large number of under-21s attending the event. The atmosphere was wonderful and the entertainment excellent, including the first openly trans singer who appeared on The Voice a couple of years ago.

We had a fabulous time meeting a lot of local residents and other support services to make our presence better known in the community. We also managed to raise some funds selling Pride Packs. We sincerely hope that this was not the last Bromsgrove Pride because it was so well attended.





### Hilary Beynon (she/her) sent us this update from FFLAG South Wales

On 26<sup>th</sup> June we held our first face to face meeting since the Covid pandemic started. It was wonderful to be together for the first time in at least 15 months. Noah kindly hosted afternoon tea for our volunteers at his home in Blackwood.

We have continued to meet on Zoom during the pandemic and now look forward to meeting up in person and to recruiting more volunteers.

Throughout the COVID crisis FFLAG has been a presence on the Welsh LGBT+ Forum and through this we have maintained good relations with *Pride Cymru*



PRIDECYMRU

We were pleased to be invited to speak about FFLAG at the online conference in the spring and were also asked to take part in interviews for the *Pride Cymru* YouTube Channel. A big thank you to Bruce from FFLAG Bristol and to Jules from FFLAG Cheltenham for their support in agreeing to talk about their experiences as parents of LGBT+ young people. You can watch it at <https://youtu.be/tXTXT-WzJmA>



Through the Welsh LGBT+ Forum we were invited to speak to a group of *Samaritan* volunteers as part of their training in August This was a very appropriate platform on which to talk about the work of FFLAG and volunteers were keen to know more about us. YMLAEN Â NI!







**One Pride event that did take place in 2021 was Trans Pride South West. Naturally, FFLAG was there and here is a report from Sarah Furley (she/her), one of FFLAG's trustees.**

2021 marks the 5<sup>th</sup> year of Bristol's Trans Pride South West. <http://tpsw.co.uk/> Since 2017 FFLAG has had a stall at the Community Day. The Day is part of a week long programme of events organized by TPSW during Trans Awareness Week. This year I went along with Bob and Sue Allen from FFLAG Bristol. This is me on the right, marching with the rest of the group and proudly holding my FFLAG placard.



The Community Day began with a vigil on College Green, marking Trans Day of Remembrance. A two-minute silence was held to honour those trans people who had died in the last year. This was followed by speeches from Kaz Self of TPSW and Bobbi Pickard of Trans in the City. Carla Denyer who is a local Councillor and co-Chair of the Green Party also spoke. As did many other trans people and allies.



Then we marched from College Green and through the city centre to The Station, where the Community Day is held. I was pleased to be marching with the OTR Freedom Youth group, who have worked closely with FFLAG Bristol, and with my child's girlfriend.

We paused in Castle Park for some more reflection from Kaz Self, before crossing the Pride crossing and walking through Broadmead, where the march terminated. Estimates of the number ranged widely between 250 and 500; there were many flags, placards and lots of chanting and best of all, the reaction of passers-by was positive.

In The Station I joined Bob and Sue and the Community Day was noticeably busier than in previous years and we had 'customers' continuously at our table for most of the afternoon.



We gave out several sets of booklets. These were taken by young people, youth workers, families and teachers, all of whom were very appreciative. We also handed out information about FFLAG Bristol's in person and/or Zoom meetings. When a young person took a booklet 'for my Mum' and we offered the Local Group meeting, if they said their parents didn't live in Bristol, it was great to be able to offer the Zoom option.

We were particularly pleased to be launching our new booklet 'How Do I Tell My Children - I'm Transgender' which was inspired by requests at Trans Pride South West in 2018 and 2019, by parents needing to break the news of their transition to their children. It was wonderful to be able to show the resource to some of these same parents and very fitting to be launching the booklet at this event. We've already received very positive feedback and the booklet is available to download from the FFLAG website. <https://www.fflag.org.uk/im-a-trans-parent/>



***In each newsletter we try and find out more about other organisations working with LGBTQ+ people or their families. This time its “Opening Doors” the UK’s largest charity connecting LGBTQ+ people over 50.***

Opening Doors is determined that LGBTQ+ people can age with dignity, fun and security in their lives. We do this by providing services and support directly to LGBTQ+ people over 50 and by working with mainstream organisations to help them develop appropriate services delivered with respect.

We have almost 2,500 members – mainly in London and surrounding areas. The pandemic has affected us all both professionally and personally. It has been an incredibly challenging time for our members – and we have tried to be there for them, especially as many lack intergenerational networks of family and friends.

Demand for our services has increased hugely as people struggle to cope with isolation and loneliness, as has the complexity of support needs the team have been supporting them to address. Our **Befriending Service** provides companionship [currently via phone] which is very welcome – but our volunteers are also trained to listen out for clues for what is going on in their clients’ lives. This means that we have been addressing issues such as clients not having food or medication, housing repairs not being attended to, carers not turning up, and a range of safeguarding issues. If we hadn’t had an ODL volunteer alert to what was going on in their lives no-one would have known or been able to do anything. But we were there - and we were able to make a difference to their lives. And because we are now offering this service via phone we have been able to extend our service across the UK.

We also provide a range of **activities and events** – currently all via Zoom or phone – to support older LGBTQ+ people stay connected with their community. This includes weekly Coffee and Chat, a monthly Sunday Get Together, support/social groups for people of colour and for trans / non-binary people. We have been able to develop our work to specialist support for people affected by dementia, and for carers.

*“The person who is chairing guides it along, keeping conversations flowing”*

*“So happy I joined Opening Doors and looking forward to seeing people face-to-face”*

*“You have made me very welcome”*

We couldn’t do 10% of what we do without our fabulous team of volunteers – many of whom are also members. They range in age from 18 – 80 and come from a cross-section of our communities. There are lots of opportunities to get involved – whether supporting admin in one of the teams, helping raise funds, speaking out about the needs and experience of older LGBTQ+ people at external events or helping us deliver our groups or training. It is another great way to connect with members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Over the last two years we have published significant research reports which we use to promote and address the needs of older LGBTQ+ people with providers and policy makers. These can be found on our website: [www.openingdoorslondon.org.uk](http://www.openingdoorslondon.org.uk)

We aim to ensure that older LGBTQ+ people live happy, healthy and independent lives that are free from loneliness, isolation, prejudice and discrimination – and we are making this a reality for our members every day!

## Can you help FFLAG?

FFLAG is a tiny charity run entirely by volunteers.  
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