

FFLAG

Supporting families and our
LGBT+ loved ones with pride

NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2024



An introduction from Sarah Furley (she/her) the Chair of FFLAG's Board of Trustees.

Hello everyone!

This year we want to build on the great momentum generated at FFLAG's 30th Anniversary conference last November. It was wonderful to see that one of our speakers, Paul Fairweather was awarded an MBE for services to people with disabilities and the LGBT community in the North West, in the King's New Year Honours List 2023. Congratulations Paul!



Paul Fairweather MBE, (he/him)

Feedback from the conference delegates has already reinvigorated the Campaigns Working Group. The volunteers have been working on the response to government consultation on the Schools Guidance for Gender Questioning Children and continue to be involved in the campaign to ban so-called conversion 'therapy.' We will also build on our relationship with Dr Adam Jowett to strengthen our voice in this fight.

This year, 30th July will mark the 5th anniversary of Out and Proud Parents' Day and we look forward to working with another of our speakers, Matt Mahmood-Ogston, of the Naz and Matt Foundation, to share our proud family stories. Keep an eye on our social media and be ready to share the love.

Another exciting opportunity for volunteers this year will be the inaugural Hatta Hodson Volunteering Award, which will be awarded in Volunteers' Week at the beginning of June. Our volunteer coordinator Emma will soon be circulating information about how to nominate your choice of inspiring volunteer.

And finally, on the topic of inspiration can I draw your attention to the final article in the newsletter. Founder member Angie Woods couldn't join us at #FFLAG30, but the beautiful words of her personal reflection on 30 years of FFLAG will make your heart swell. It is a wonderful record of the family love, pride and fight against injustice which has been at the heart of FFLAG since we came together to champion our children.

FFLAG is planning to be at lots of Pride events – come and join us!

Prides are an important part of FFLAG’s campaigning work. At Pride events we can demonstrate our love for, and pride in, our children. As well as sending the powerful message that “parents love their LGBT+ children” to anyone in the crowd. Where we have a stall, we can make connections with other LGBT+ support organisations and with the local community, offering support where needed.



We hope you are able to join us at one of the many Pride events we are attending. This is the list at the time of going to press. For the very latest list check <https://www.fflag.org.uk/news/>

DATE	LOCATION / EVENT	CONTACT
27th April	Falmouth Pride	sarah@fflag.org.uk
18th May	Cheltenham Pride	fflagcheltenham@gmail.com
15th June	Cowbridge Pride	hilary@fflag.org.uk
22nd June	Stroud Pride	fflagcheltenham@gmail.com
22nd June	Cardiff Pride	hilary@fflag.org.uk
29th June	London Pride	Admin@fflag.org.uk
29th June	Abergaveny Pride	hilary@fflag.org.uk
13th July	Bristol Pride	fflagbristo1@gmail.com
August: exact date to be confirmed	UK Black Pride, in London	Admin@fflag.org.uk
31st August	Cornwall Pride, in Truro	sarah@fflag.org.uk
7th September	Torbay Pride	sarah@fflag.org.uk
7th September	Newport Pride	hilary@fflag.org.uk
14th September	Gloucester Pride	fflagcheltenham@gmail.com



UK BLACK PRIDE

Register to join us at Pride in London and at UK Black Pride. Travel bursaries are available to enable people from outside London to attend.

Pride in London is on Saturday 29th June 2024. It's our big push for visibility – and a fantastic uplifting experience.

The date for UK Black Pride is not finalised but it will be in August. We know we are not reaching as many families from the global majority as we would like, so we are ensuring once details are known we apply for a stall there.

Last year we attended both events and they were a great success. We want to make even more impact this year so please consider joining us

Want to join us at Pride in London? We will have a limited number of wristbands, so please contact admin@fflag.org.uk to register your interest as soon as possible and you'll then be contacted when we have all the information and kept in touch with arrangements.

We realise that some people from outside London are put off from coming because of the cost of travel. This year we are able to offer help with that with our new travel bursaries. Details are available from admin@fflag.org.uk

Want to join us at UK Black Pride? Register your interest at admin@fflag.org.uk once we have more details we will get back to you. And again we realise that some people from outside London are put off from coming because of the cost of travel. This year we are able to offer help with that with our new travel bursaries. Details are available from admin@fflag.org.uk





FFLAG's 30 years conference was held in Birmingham in November last year. Sorrel Atkinson (she/her) sent us this report.

The theme of the conference was '**Getting Together**', '**Working Together**', '**Forward Together**' and on November 4th we did all of that in true FFLAG family style.

We got together to celebrate our 30th Anniversary in Birmingham, with volunteers, FFLAG groups, friends, founders, patrons and trustees arriving from across the country. It was lovely to welcome FFLAG founder members Kath Lovell and Cath Johnson. Although founders Jenny Broughton, Mavis Morris, Frances Nichol and Angie Wood were not able to join us, they all sent their love and messages of support. We were so grateful to our wonderful Patrons Michael Cashman and Bobbi Pickard who gave such heartfelt speeches and to Ian McKellen and Peter Tatchell who recorded such inspiring videos of support and appreciation of FFLAG.



FFLAG Chair Sarah Furley in the centre with Patrons Bobbi Pickard (2nd from left), Lord Michael Cashman (far right – on the picture at least!) and speakers (far left) Dr Adam Jowett and Matt Mahmood-Ogston (2nd from right)

We were 'working together' throughout the day. Everyone participated in a series of workshops, carefully planned so that everyone was able to take part in each of them. We were delighted to welcome Paul Fairweather, Dr. Adam Jowett and Matt Mahmood-Ogston to lead the workshops. Paul Fairweather's workshop raised awareness of HIV, the evolving attitudes and the importance

of challenging stigma. Dr Adam Jowett ran workshops on the significance of families and friends in so-called 'conversion therapy' practices. Matt Mahmood-Ogston of Naz and Matt Foundation spoke about tackling homophobia triggered by religion or culture.

'Working together' seamlessly morphed in to 'forward together', as our own FFLAG Ambassador Bruce Kent led us in to the Campaigning workshop, pulling together the threads of a vision and strategy for FFLAG's future campaigning work. That campaigning will be going forward, led by trustee Hugh Fell who sadly was not able to be with us on the day.



Awards presented by Lord Cashman to Cath Johnson, Sue Allen and Kath Lovell

Although we all worked hard, there was plenty of time for catching up with old friends and opportunities to make new ones. Tea and coffee breaks enhanced by excellent cakes and even better conversations kept us all going. After a busy networking lunch we all took great pleasure in watching Michael Cashman present tokens of FFLAG's appreciation to Kath Lovell and Cath Johnson. Given her dedication and tireless work for FFLAG it should have been no surprise that the trustees also wanted to honour Sue Allen. She did seem a little surprised when Michael asked her to come forward for an award! The standing ovation she received and the damp eyes of many in the audience showed how much she is appreciated, and as she said, she couldn't have done it all without her dear husband Bob. The FFLAG family working together.

As the day drew to a close, we were able to reflect on all that FFLAG has achieved over the past three decades and know that we had spent a day connecting with those in the FFLAG family and beyond. We were able to project into the future knowing that we have a growing base of enthusiastic volunteers supported by our volunteer coordinator Emma Hague, who did such an excellent job of organising the conference.

We left with renewed energy for campaigning, for ensuring that the work of FFLAG is more widely known and, perhaps most important of all, continuing in our endeavours to make the world a better place for our LGBTQI+ loved ones.



Janet Kent (she/her) reports back from Transpride South West's "Community Day" in Bristol last November.

Saturday November 25th was the date of Trans Pride Southwest's community day which took place for the 8th time in Bristol. The sun was shining but the temperature had dropped several degrees so it was good that we could meet up at the wonderfully inclusive Watershed Café at Bristol's harbourside for a hot drink before the march. 17 of us met together, including our stalwart group from FFLAG South Wales and others as far afield as Cornwall, Newbury and Salisbury. We appreciated you being with us!



There were some impassioned speeches on College Green after what has been an emotional year for many of our trans family members. The emphasis was on remembering those trans/non binary community members who are no longer with us.

The march felt bigger than last year and was certainly longer as we wound our way through the heart of the city, through Broadmead and past Cabots Circus. Here the streets were busier, so more people would have seen us, making even more impact than in previous years.



The parade was lively with colourful dancers from the start and loud chants being made along the way, such as "trans rights are human rights." Some remarked they were hoarse by the time they entered the Station, where the community stalls were laid out.

One parent expressed how they had been wondering whether they should be on the march at all. Then they had a moving conversation with a trans woman who was very appreciative that parents had come along to be allies. It shows how important it is for us to stand together. With hate against our trans loved ones on the rise, it's so important to give this powerful statement of love and support.

In the afternoon we networked with other local groups and did brisk business at our FFLAG stall. People were particularly pleased to see our guides specifically for parents and carers of trans and non-binary people and appreciated the role we continue to play supporting parents everywhere.



As always in our newsletter we have a round up of news from local groups across the UK.



Jules Tayler (she/her) sent us an update from FFLAG Cheltenham where she has been very active with schools and young people.

I mentioned in the previous newsletter that we had been asked to do some work in one of our local schools. FFLAG Cheltenham has now actually delivered 8 sessions (“Feeling ok with who I am” and “Ways to be inclusive”) to year 10s in a local school. This has been very worthwhile, and my hope is that these young people will go out into the world better informed and feel more comfortable with who they are.

Another session was delivered, online to CASA. CASA is the Community Autism Support and Advice Service in Gloucestershire. The service supports autistic adults, their friends and families.

Before we know it the Pride season will be upon us!

Now and by no means least... A big thank you for the super weekend at the FFLAG conference amongst people who I am pleased to call dear friends. How blessed we are to have our LGBTQ+ children- otherwise we may never have met...



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

Parents of Jewish Gays and Lesbians - supporting parents with gay, lesbian, bi, trans, queer and non-binary children - goes from strength to strength reaching out across the religious community and welcoming new and old parents to meetings in each other’s homes.

Contact details: [Email: parentsigl@gmail.com](mailto:parentsigl@gmail.com)
<http://parentsofjewishgaysandlesbians.co.uk>



Hilary Beynon (she/her) sent us an update from FFLAG South Wales.

South Wales seems to be as busy as ever. We now meet regularly on the third Thursday of the month at the PrideCymru offices in the centre of Cardiff. This is a perfect location and also cements our relationship with them.

We are also planning to start a regular Zoom meeting hoping to include potential parents from North Wales. This is being made possible through PrideCymru and the Wales LGBTQ + Forum.

This summer we intend to be present at Prides in Cardiff (22nd June), Cowbridge (15th June), Abergavenny (29th June) and Newport (7th September) - perhaps more!

In February some of us had a great time yet again at the Cardiff Devils Pride event. This is an annual event with our local ice hockey team and one we try and make sure we don't miss because it is such a great time and we are made so very welcome.

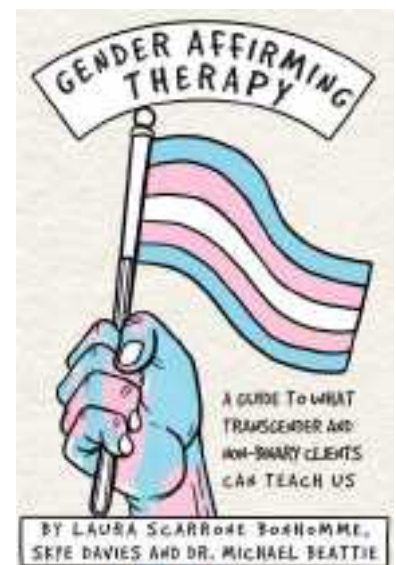
Ymlaen â ni !



Families Together London is a support group for the parents, families and friends of LGBT+ people. Jackie Briggs (she/her), a member of the Steering Committee, provided us with an update

We have had an incredibly busy end to 2023 and great start to 2024. You can find lots more information on our news and events page on our website at <https://www.familiestogetherlondon.com/news-events>

Laura Scarrone Bonhomme gave a talk organised by Gill who along with David runs our FTL-T. This is FTL specifically for families with Trans children. Laura was over in the UK to launch her new book. She has been to FTL on a number of occasions, and we were delighted that she made time for us in September.



Natalie Gamble did a wonderful Zoom talk about surrogacy. She is the founder of the fertility law firm NGA – the first firm of solicitors in the UK to focus specifically on fertility and creating families. We recorded the talk so do please go on the News and Events page and listen to her intelligent and supportive talk.



Bank of America was our next event. Gill, David and I went to their offices and spent a full hour with a number of staff members who took time out. It must have made a change for them not to have to look at a screen!! We just have conversation when we give talks. So much nicer for all and not a screen in sight. Again, go onto our News and events page to read all about it.

Our next item was a return visit from Henry Hudson who is the Founder of People Change Minds. Again a very well presented talk with a bit of role-play from the members included. That's always fun.



Gill and I attended the FFLAG 30th Anniversary conference. It was informative and very well organised. We were so glad that we made the trip up to Birmingham.



I was asked to go down to Reynolds Performing Arts College in Dartford to speak to the students about our group. They were having a specific discussion on LGBT+ issues in the theatre. I went down with some of our pens but they all wanted one so posted a batch down to them as I had no idea they would all want one. Apparently pens are 'a thing'. Please go on the website and read all about it. (Just to let you know we had permission to use this photo!)

This photo is of our Celebratory Lunch held in December. We decided not to do a fund-raising lunch with raffle but just invite as many members and their families as wanted to come and to bring with them a dish for the table. The photo is just showing a small amount of what was on offer. It was a great success, and everybody went away with full tummies and a smile on their face.



As you can tell we are a very active group, so if you are in London, or you know someone who is in London, and would benefit from what we, do tell them to get in touch. We will make them very welcome.



Janet Kent (she/her) sent us an update on the activity at FFLAG Bristol

At FFLAG Bristol we continue to see new parents coming along and it's so good to find those who are further along the journey encouraging the newcomers and new friendships being formed.



Since our last newsletter, there have been a few events going on, including an invitation from LUSH for us to give a short talk on one of their training days on 12th October. Part of the training was to hear from some of the organisations who have benefitted from their Charity Pot scheme and to inspire more staff to get behind it. LUSH have been very good to us and also gave us a generous donation for taking part.

On November 4th, a group from Bristol attended the #FFLAG conference which has helped build relationships as well as envision and inspire us for the future. Then 3 weeks later it was Trans Pride Southwest (see separate article about this) which was an occasion to show our support for our trans family.



In February, Bruce and I attended “Embracing Diversity”, an event organised by Avon and Somerset police so they could listen to LGBTQ+ communities to try and improve trust and confidence going forward. It was wonderfully encouraging that two people came up to me to say how much FFLAG has meant to them. One person said it had been helpful that FFLAG was there during their time of coming out. Another wanted to thank us because their parents had been helped and they were sure FFLAG had made a huge difference to the relationship they were able to have with their parents. So that's a shout out to FFLAG and the booklets that are available because we know it wasn't us personally who made the difference in these peoples' lives.

Finally, we were invited to join the University of Bristol's Parents and Carers network during one of their lunchtime events to give a talk about how best to support a loved one in their journey of coming out and understanding their identity. One of our mums, Gráinne, had her first experience of sharing her story (with the permission of her young person) at an event like this and I also went to talk a little about what FFLAG Bristol is able to offer locally. There were some positive responses from parents and some interesting discussions at the end. One thing that stood out for Gráinne was a conversation with a parent who was finding things hard as they weren't sure what was going on with their young person and Gráinne found herself saying maybe we shouldn't be trying to label our children, just accepting them as they are and being supportive as they are trying to work out things for themselves. Simple healing words!





Chris Warren from New Road Parents group sent us an update on their activities.

We are a group of parents and carers in Worcestershire and South Birmingham area, whose children have come out to them as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Non-binary or Gender-fluid. There are other categories too. We may have more than one such child and they may have come out at any age from very young into adulthood.

We meet usually on the third Tuesday evening of each month. Due to rising costs, we have now moved our face-to-face meetings venue thanks to the help of one of our kind group members.

The group continues to go from strength to strength with regular new members contacting us for support. We have also forged links with local agencies (NHS and social services) to be on the register of groups in the West Midlands area. You can contact us at newroadparents@gmail.com



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.

Last autumn Free2B took part in a fabulous Trans shopping evening organised by the amazing team at the Oasis charity shops. It was an invite only event to keep everyone safe – with 28 attendees on the day! Including Free2B families. There were fem and masc stylists on hand together with hair, make-up and wig expertise to provide support. The event had a wonderful community atmosphere full of queer joy and that has been reflected in the feedback received:

“I enjoyed it but more importantly, so did my child! Especially positive to meet lots of diverse people happily shopping! Thank you for organising ♥”

“Was a lovely evening, well done! We loved it”

“What a great event that was!”



We very much hope Oasis will organise some more events over the coming year...



We also had a fabulous family trip with parents and children visiting Kew Gardens for their Queer Nature exhibition. It was such a wonderful day out we are now exploring a group picnic in the summer!



Angie Wood was one of the founders of FFLAG. As we celebrate 30 years of the organisation we asked her about our history and her memories

Hooray for FFLAG! 30 Years of Making a Difference!

I was surprised and pleased to be invited to share some thoughts and memories of FFLAG, so here goes:-

How did FFLAG really start? Who sowed the seed?

It started many years ago, when some individual mothers took their love for their gay children and their courage in both hands. They raised their heads above the parapet - out and proud – “Here we are!” These pioneering parents provided a non-judgmental listening ear, a safe place for parents and their children to share all their fears and feelings. It should be remembered that by providing these life lines and understanding to other parents of gay children, these parents were swimming against the tide of a highly prejudicial and homophobic society. Remember, too, it was only in 1967 that the law was changed and homosexual activity, in certain circumstances, was de-criminalised.

Soon these pockets of hope found out about each other, communication grew and a network of mothers, fathers and other family members, began to develop.

My own introduction to the need for Parent’s Groups came when one of my children came out at age eighteen, in the 1980s. I felt confused and isolated and was convinced my child would lead a sad and lonely life and believed that, as a mother, this was entirely my fault! I still remember the very first time I spoke, on the phone, to another mother of a gay child. After speaking with her, I felt less isolated and confused and more optimistic about my child’s future.



Subsequently, I found Manchester Parent’s Group, which served to strengthen my belief that a group of people with a shared concern or issue can derive great comfort and understanding from each other. I felt accepted, as if I was now able to release my breath, as there was no need to weigh my words or just keep silent. It was my own ‘coming out’, in a safe place, which paved the way for future ‘coming out’ in less accepting situations.

Like most parents, after acknowledgment and acceptance, comes action!

We got angry!

Why should our gay children be victimized, marginalized, made to feel ‘less than’?

Why should we, as parents need a support group, just because some of our children are gay? Society is the problem, not our children!

Do parents need a support group because some of their children are heterosexual?

Anger can be a force for positive action and we knew that something had to change. Support was essential, but not enough and so the idea of FFLAG was born. It was to be an 'umbrella' organisation for the Parent's Groups around the country, but with a specific campaigning arm.



The balance of support and campaigning was the main point of discussion in the early days. It is true to say that the development of FFLAG, as a fully functioning organisation, with a clear focus and modus operandi, was not without drama! It followed the same growth pattern as most new organisations/teams - that of 'forming', 'storming', 'norming' and 'performing'. We had our fair share of 'storming', as there were differing ideas of what should be the focus and how we should proceed. However, our common purpose and a determination that FFLAG would succeed, saw us through and soon we were flying!

In the early days FFLAG meetings were held in parent's living rooms, with cups of tea and digestive biscuits! Minutes were typed up on trusty typewriters – no fancy computers to be seen!

An 'acorn' of an idea grew and grew and now, thirty years later, the beautiful Oak Tree that is FFLAG is bigger, stronger, more diverse, embracing change and technology, expanding its remit (especially in the area of transgender issues) providing support and campaigning in equal measure!

Sadly, our society seems to have slipped backwards in recent years and there is an increase in homophobia, transphobia and other prejudices (distressed people seeking asylum, for example). Anyone who is deemed to be 'different' is classed as the 'other' and considered of little account. FFLAG's work to counter this is just as essential as it was 30 years ago.

Some memories:-

1) A demonstration against the infamous, homophobic Clause 28 of 1988

A mum standing on a platform in Manchester and, as an introduction to her speech, proclaimed "I am a mother, the proud mother of a gay son!"

The crowd erupted with mighty cheers and prolonged applause! This was moving for two reasons. Firstly, a clear sign of the absolute need for us, as parents to stand up and be counted. Secondly, although the cheers and applause were lovely, it underlined the injustice of our gay children feeling the need to be grateful for their parent's pride and acceptance.

2) *The very first World Pride in Rome, 2000*

FFLAG had an open topped double-decker bus in the parade. We had a splendid bird's eye view of the 70 thousand people thronging the streets. As far as the eye could see, a mass of rainbows, music and smiling faces. Young people, from 40 countries, all over the world, were waving at us, blowing us kisses and shouting "Thank you! Thank you!"



Of course, this reaction to the presence of parents happens on Pride parades all the time, but I think the scale of the World Pride was so huge, that the impact was magnified. This memory makes me weep sad and happy tears, even today. Sad tears because why should any of our children feel they need to say "Thank you" just for being loved? Happy tears because these young people knew that we were on their side, standing with them, trying to make it better, because that's what parents do.

3) *A FFLAG Training Weekend in Leicester, 2003*

We arrived at the hotel on Friday and settled in, ready for a full programme of speakers and workshops on Saturday. As I was getting ready in my room the next morning, I turned on the TV. The screen was full of the bombing of Iraq, I just burst into tears at the horror of it all. However, despite our shock and distress, we all rallied and actively participated in the planned training programme. Our hearts were heavy with grief, but we knew that full participation in training was crucial to continuing FFLAG's important work and something positive and good to focus on.

4) *Another protest rally against Clause 28, early 1990s*

Standing, silently in a row, with other parents, posters hanging round our necks, like advertising 'sandwich boards'. The posters had enlarged early school photos of our, then grown up, children on them and wording such as "Equality for our Children"; "Recognition for our Children" etc. Our children's trusting and smiling faces gazed out at all who stopped to look – innocent little ones, unaware of the hurdles that an unaccepting society would place in their paths.

Later, when FFLAG was up and running, we determined that our children (and their families) would no longer be invisible. Early FFLAG Conferences were entitled "Invisible Families", held in Leicester and "Invisible Children", held in Manchester. It is such a joy to receive the FFLAG Newsletter. It is the perfect antidote to all the darkness in the world today. Reading about all the very active Parent's Groups around the country, who are supporting parents; helping young people; educating and informing their communities and having such a visible presence, warms my heart and gives me hope.

I am so grateful and happy that I was able to contribute, as a very small cog, in the special wheel that is FFLAG and privileged to have worked with inspirational and dedicated friends and colleagues, some of whom are no longer with us. One day, FFLAG will be obsolete and there will be no need for support groups, and what a day that will be! But, until that day comes, FFLAG and all the groups are vital to continue the work for complete equality for all our children.

Here is one of my favourite stories - for when the going gets tough; when things are difficult; when we wonder if we can ever make a difference and the odds seem stacked against us. It is the story of the Starfish and comes from a book called 'Chicken Soup for the Soul' by Jack Canfield.

'A friend of ours was walking down a deserted beach at sunset. As he walked along, he began to see another man in the distance. As he grew closer, he noticed that the man kept bending down, picking something up and throwing it into the water. Time and again he kept throwing things into the ocean. As our friend approached even closer, he noticed that the man was picking up starfish that had been washed on to the beach and, one at a time, he was throwing them back into the water. Our friend was puzzled. He approached the man and said "Good evening, friend. I was wondering what you are doing".

"I am throwing these starfish back into the ocean. You see, it is low tide now and all of these starfish have been washed up onto the shore. If I don't throw them back into the sea, they will die from lack of oxygen."

"I understand", our friend replied, "but there must be thousands of starfish on this beach. You can't possibly get to all of them, there are simply too many. Don't you realise that this is probably happening on hundreds of other beaches all up and down the coast. Can't you see that you can't possibly make a difference?"

The local man smiled, bent down and picked up yet another starfish, and as he threw it into the sea, he replied, "Made a difference to that one!"

As the mother of two wonderful grown up children, one of whom is gay, I want to say a big "Thank you!" to everyone involved in FFLAG today. You are making a difference and helping to make the world a better place. What better legacy could any one of us wish for?