



# GALHA NEWS

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GAY & LESBIAN HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

Issue 25

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## SCHOOL ASSEMBLY GALHA MARKS IDAHO

This year's International Day Against Homophobia had a theme of 'fighting homophobia in and through education'. GALHA marked the event with a major panel discussion.

The speakers were: **Tony Fenwick**, Co chair of Schools Out and LGBT History Month, **Elly Barnes**, Music teacher and Diversity Course Leader at Stoke Newington School, **Janet Palmer**, HM Inspector, Ofstead, National Advisor for Personal Social, Health and Economic Education, **Lydia Malmédie**, Stonewall Education Officer, and **Adrian Tippetts**, Freelance journalist and NSS Council Member.

The presentation was followed by a Q&A session, highlights of which are presented here:

**How do you deal with teachers or parents who say that homosexuality is not something that is discussed within their religion or culture?**

**Lydia:** What we would say in instances of homophobic bullying is that no parent wants to see their child bullied, and no parent wants to see their child be a bully. Homophobic bullying is bullying, full stop, and we need to address that. We'd then perhaps make parallels with bullying because of religious belief or bullying because of the colour of someone's skin, or bullying because of who someone's parents are - none of that can be tolerated. All religious communities have something akin to 'love thy neighbor'. A lot of schools see tackling homophobic bullying as part of that ethos, rather than something that they can't or shouldn't talk about.

**Tony:** I think the first thing to say to a parent is, "Do you want your child to be bullied? Do you want your child to be the victim of the child abuse that goes on in our schools, sometimes on a day-to-day basis? Do you think that's fair? Do you think that's ok?" That's the way to start challenging, and then work around the issue from there. I was listening to a Nigerian yesterday. He was talking about his fourth attempt at suicide when he was 19 years old. He had a Muslim father and a Catholic mother, and he believed in hell as a reality. He was brought up to believe in hell. He believed he was going to spend eternity burning, he believed that he was going to spend eternity having maggots crawl through his eyes. And he couldn't face that, so he thought: Before this sexuality of mine leads me to do something that is going to take me to hell, I'm going to have to get rid of myself. And that's why he attempted suicide four times. That's the way to challenge it - do you want your child to be bullied? Do you want this to be your child?

**Ellie:** It's so simple. If your school celebrates diversity, then you celebrate ALL of the diverse strands. You cannot pick and choose which diversities you are going to buy into and which ones you aren't. That's totally unacceptable, as a school. There's also the fact that we have the equality act - you are a diverse community - that's what schools are. And also, you've got to give young people facts. You're not lying by acknowledging the existence of LGBT people - they exist and are real - this is a fact that no one from any religion can dispute.



From left: Tony Fenwick, Janet Palmer, GALHA Chair Adam Knowles, Adrian Tippetts, Lydia Malmédie, and Elly Barnes.

**What can we make of Michael Gove saying that the equality act doesn't apply to the curriculum?**

**Janet:** He's wrong and the department had to kind of apologise on his behalf. The equality act applies throughout a school. He also once said that you don't need sex education as long as you get five good GCSEs...!

**What do you make of the recent report on homophobia in schools by Mark McCormack, a Brunel University sociologist?**

**Ellie:** From what I can gather he's basically saying that it's getting better. But that doesn't mean that we should be complacent - the reason that it's getting better is all the work that everyone here is doing - it's not just happened by magic, it's happened by years and years of hard work.

**Tony:** I was at a meeting where he spoke yesterday, and he said that the key is visibility. Countries like Italy and Bulgaria are having terrible problems because there are no gay or lesbian people on TV or in the media. There are no images of them - they don't exist.

**Lydia:** Prevention is the cure. It should be addressed from the beginning - different families should be talked about. As Tony said, visibility should be there from the very start, and that includes lesbian, gay and bisexual parents. The results of our Stonewall 2012 'School Report', in which we have spoken to over 1000 LGBT young people of secondary school age, will be released at our conference on the 5th of July. That should reveal a few things: Is it getting better? Where is it getting better? Are people reporting homophobic bullying more? Are people prepared to tackle it? That will be very interesting to see.

## WEDDING ROWS



GALHA Chair Adam Knowles (right) and Andrew Copson - Chief Executive of the British Humanist Association (and former GALHA Chair) - here attending the gay marriage debate which took place at the Emmanuel Centre in Westminster on May 29th. Andrew was speaking for the motion: 'This house would legalise same-sex marriage in England and Wales.' Also speaking in favour were Professor Tina

Beattie and Doctor Jonathan Romain. Speaking against were representatives from Christian group 'Catholic Voices', who co-hosted the event with the BHA. There was strong audience support for both opposing points of view. However, a poll at the end of the debate revealed that despite vigorous reasoning from all involved, absolutely no one present had had their viewpoint changed in any way whatsoever.

## MARRIAGE CONSULTATION

The government consultation on gay marriage ended on Thursday 15th June. Committee member Henry Lawson submitted a response on behalf of GALHA. Selected sections are reproduced here. (full version and submission by NW LGBT Humanists will be available on our website)

**Question 1: Do you agree or disagree with enabling all couples, regardless of their gender to have a civil marriage ceremony?** Agree

**Question 2: Please explain the reasons for your answer.**

We believe strongly in marriage equality for gay and lesbian couples, for several reasons: Marriage represents the single most socially accepted expression of a lifelong commitment to another person based on mutual love, loyalty, commitment and support. The denial of the right to marry to same sex couples effectively denies gay people equal access to the institution of marriage.

The benefits that wider society derives from opposite sex marriage also apply to same sex marriage. Where same sex couples are raising children then they and their children can expect to benefit from any effects of greater stability and durability of relationships. Where same sex couples

have no children then the social benefits will be as for childless heterosexual couples.



For example, if marital relationships last longer, they are more likely to be there to provide support for their spouse when sick, or unemployed or in old age, a net benefit for society.

Maintaining marriage as an exclusively heterosexual institution, with a parallel similar but not quite equal institution reserved for same sex couples, reinforces the idea that gay people are somehow apart from the rest of society rather than being an integral part of it. Same sex marriage will underline the reality that we are one society.

**Question 16: Do you have any other comments on the proposals within this consultation?**

A key aspect of our support for same-sex marriage is that same sex and opposite sex couples should enjoy equal rights in all areas: Equal access to civil marriage. Equal access to religious marriage - for those religious organisations that choose to perform both opposite sex marriages and same sex marriages. Equal access to civil partnerships - if a decision is made to retain these.

## EDITOR'S NOTES

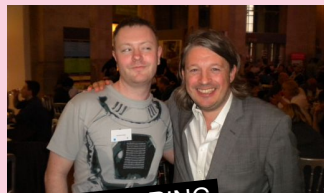
As I write this in late June, all that anybody seems to be talking about is gay marriage. One recent story to have made the front pages is the Church of England claiming that homosexual matrimony represents the biggest threat to them in 500 years. Blimey! But it's generally a good thing that it's being talked about. And the louder the religious lobby shrieks it's hyperbole, the more out-of-touch and absurd it sounds. The general public opinion would seem to be leaning in our favour.

I find it surprising, then, when I encounter LGBT people who oppose marriage equality. Usually this opinion comes from a lack of personal desire to enter into a matrimonial arrangement themselves - a position that I quite understand - but I fail to see the logic of opposing equality for others who seek it.

I may not decide to get married myself. But I think it's vitally important that the option is there for gay couples who do. It's desperately important that teenage gays and lesbians can grow up without thinking that they are freaks who have to stand outside of society looking in. We are NOT third class citizens who are almost, but not

quite, deserving of the same rights as everybody else. I salute everyone who's taken part in the battle for equality - a long struggle that's finally got us to here, the point at which this is a serious proposal.

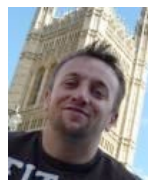
On a lighter note, GALHA Chair Adam Knowles and I recently had the pleasure of attending the British Humanist Association's annual conference in Cardiff. (An organisation that GALHA is imminently to become a section of.) When I approached one of the guests - top stand-up comic Richard Herring - for a photograph, he indicated that we should print it in GALHA News with the following phrase...



**RICHARD HERRING  
SUPPORTS EQUAL MARRIAGE!**

Richard Unwin  
Editor@galha.org

## VIGILANCE



**Campaigner and freelance journalist  
ADRIAN TIPPETTS  
on the dangers of complacency.**

If the furore over allowing same-sex couples to marry should teach us anything, it is that the fight to be treated as equals in society, and to enjoy truly equal opportunities, is going to be a long and bitter one. Even though it is highly likely the push for marriage equality will succeed, we still have a long way to go before LGBT people can truly claim to have equal chances in life.

Homophobic attitudes still prevail. We are more likely to be subject to bullying and abuse, to be made homeless. The law allows faith schools to pretend we don't exist, by opting out on teaching about homosexuality, or worse, even teaching that gay people are called to lead lives of celibacy. It is no surprise that rates of depression and self-harm are much higher among LGBT people.

While the evidence is damning, the government doesn't take the plight of LGBT people seriously, or is too scared to do so. Whenever sensible proposals are put forward to tackle homophobia in schools, the right-wing media and extreme religious groups create hysteria by presenting such initiatives as 'sexualising' children, or even

attempts to 'promote' homosexuality, as if it were a disease you can catch. This view carries more influence than it should because the religious groups who support it lobby the ministers, and encourage their supporters to write en-masse to their MPs.

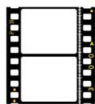
In the face of this, we have to get organised. Illogical or unfounded claims about LGBT parenting, the consequences of equal marriage, need to be refuted or condemned. Get onto the blogosphere, contact your local editor and tackle this nonsense head-on.

The government wants to cut housing benefits for under 25s. This will hit LGBT homeless people, who make up a quarter of the total homeless population in London, especially. Their voices have gone unheard, making it easy for ministers to implement a potentially ruinous policy. Unless we write to our MPs and kick up a fuss about it, they will get away with it.

Evidence says that sex and relationship education is the best way to reduce STD infections and homophobia. The department of education doesn't respect the evidence because they can't or aren't stand up to faith school lobbyists. Here again, we need to make sure our voice counts. And if it means rallies or even targeted campaigns to unseat ministers that make such disastrous policies, so be it. Maybe that is what it takes to make our representatives listen?

Whatever you do, don't just sit back and let all this happen.

## THIS IS WHAT LOVE IN ACTION LOOKS LIKE



In the summer of 2005, Zach Stark, a 16 year old wrote on his MySpace blog about his parents sending him to a "Fundamentalist Christian" program that strives to turn gay teens straight. This documentary follows the inspirational story of a local community standing up for their friend with daily protests at the facility.

The film was screened at the June GALHA public meeting. Presented here is a selection of the feedback that we received from those who attended:

The film was disturbing, I think it illustrates to me the issue of freedom of speech and religious belief over our moral duty to campaign against the abuse and victimisation of LGBT people, regardless of the liberal idea of 'people have the right to believe in what they want too, and indoctrinate their children into that same belief'. We all become victims of what we witness.

I believe any religious or non-religious practice or institution that uses guilt, shame and self-loathing to internalise negative feeling about yourself, particularly at a young age, should not be tolerated by a civil society, let alone funded by the state.

### Paul Allen

Personally, I thought the documentary was informative and well made. However I don't think it made it clear enough how aversion theory simply doesn't work. Many religious people with views sympathetic to the idea

of trying to cure homosexuality may watch this and whilst the film is unlikely to change their beliefs it could have been clearer that it has been proved by many different organisations that it simply doesn't work and is incredibly dangerous.

### Chris

The film was a brave account of how modern media and the immediacy of internet communication make it possible for information to be shared quickly and effectively trigger social change. By simply sharing his feelings and concern about being sent to the 'Love in Action' program as a consequence of his coming out, Zach made clear how he was being coerced into it against his will and raised awareness both about how the program operates and how parental guidance can be biased. The family as an institution can be pressured by societal inaction, and by interest groups (such as religious ones) in the perpetuation of 'compulsory heterosexuality'.

The response of Zach's friends, readers and supporters moved by the perceived injustice in what Zach was made to stand, was amazing. Ordinary people, with no background in social action, organised, got involved in a long-term protest and eventually succeeded in challenging both the organisation and methods of 'Refuge' that eventually closed down. And although it was but a battle won in a general war of power between economically driven religious interests and the state it was a very important one in reinstating the power of change within citizenship and active participation.

### Serena

I really enjoyed the film because it seemed an important story to tell, it raised my awareness on the topic of conversion therapy, and stimulated me to be more active in asserting sexual orientation rights.

### Fioenzo

## SUMMER SOCIAL

**Friday 13th July** at the Somers Town Coffeehouse Bistro Pub (Just five minutes from London's Kings Cross Station) from 6.30pm.

The venue serves both a main menu and a bar menu until 10.00pm. Look out for the committee members who'll be wearing GALHA badges and will be more than happy to chat, answer any questions, and gladly accept the odd pint or two!

**PLEASE NOTE: THE PREVIOUSLY ADVERTISED JULY EVENT, THE TALK ON ROBERT INGERSOLL, HAS NOW BEEN CANCELLED**

## WEEKEND 2012: MANCHESTER

We can now announce the full programme for this year's weekend, which jointly celebrates the **Alan Turing centenary and Manchester's gay history**.

### Friday 12 October

**7.00pm** Meet for pre-dinner drinks at the group hotel, the Mercure on Portland Street. Afterwards you'll be free to eat in the hotel restaurant or in the gay village or Chinatown, both of which are a stone's throw away, or indeed anywhere else.

### Saturday 13 October

We'll be based for most of the day at the **Lesbian and Gay Foundation (LGF)**, a short walk from the Mercure. The day's programme will be:

**10.00am** Opening address by Andrew Copson, Chief Executive of the BHA

**10.30am** Alan Turing Tour. We will move across to Manchester University where Henry McGhie, curator of the Alan Turing Exhibition in the adjacent Manchester Museum will guide us on a tour of places in the university where Turing worked (not normally open to the public); explain the background to Turing's move to Manchester; and describe how he put the exhibition together

**12.30pm** Return to LGF for a buffet lunch  
**2.00pm-4.00pm** ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING - GALHA's first as a section of the BHA - followed by workshops to develop our new action plan  
**7.00 for 7.30pm** Private Dinner at the

Mercure Hotel. Our guest speaker will be Cllr Paul Fairweather. Paul has been a Labour councillor on Manchester city council for 10 years and leads on gay men's issues, having previously been involved in a wide range of local LGBT community organisations since the early seventies. He has been the fulltime worker at the Manchester lesbian and gay centre and worked as an Equal opportunities Officer Gay men for Manchester City Council.

### Sunday 14 October

**10.00am:** guided walk through Manchester's gay History. The walk will be led by Professor Carole Truman, internationally renowned Professor of Health and Community Studies at Bolton University, and supporter of the local LGBT Humanist group.

### Accommodation

Although the Mercure is the "official" hotel, there are other options including the Ibis just along Portland Street. And if you live locally you won't need a hotel at all, of course!

### Booking

A booking form is enclosed with this newsletter. You can also - book online: <http://bit.ly/galhaconf2012> email: [secretary@galha.org](mailto:secretary@galha.org) or write to: The Secretary, GALHA, 1 Gower Street, London WC1E 6HD.