

GALHA NEWS

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GAY & LESBIAN HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

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GayFamilyWeb venture a success, despite hostility

The first UK gay fertility centre, which has opened an office in Birmingham, is proving very popular, according to its founders a lesbian couple, Natalie Drew and Ashling Phillips. Advertised on the internet, the service helped 60 couples last year and costs £9.99 a month, with extra fees for tests and consultations.

Parents themselves of two delightful children - with the help of an involved donor - the couple wanted 'to set up something where we would act as a go-between and where couples could meet potential donors face-to-face to work things out. We also want to save people from having to explain their situation, that they are gay and using a donor.'

Lesbian couples seeking the help of mainstream fertility clinics have not always been treated sensitively in the context of a service designed for those with fertility problems, which most people do not have. Staff may also still assume that gay parenthood is a lifestyle choice. In a letter to the press 'Becky, Birmingham' wrote: 'I have not or ever been "infertile". Surely medical staff can be better informed to deal with same sex couples and the options available to them. There is so much support and funding available for heterosexual couples, why the

big uproar because some specialised support is made available where it is most needed?' Those resorting to private clinics have also found the process very costly.

There has indeed been a measure of uproar. News of the centre's opening was greeted by predictable hostility from some religious quarters.

Mike Judge, of the Christian Institute, opined: 'Kids need a mum and a dad, a male and female role model. This is denying that. This clinic is more to do with the desires of adults rather than the best interests of children.' He cannot have read research indicating that children of same-sex couples are just as happy as children from traditional families. In fact the latest research from the UK, the Netherlands and the USA indicates that not only do they do just as well generally, but in many areas of life children brought up by two lesbian parents actually fare better than other children. They have been found to be more aspiring, more confident and less prejudiced than other children. It's hardly surprising in fact when these children are so wanted by couples who are likely to have been more thoughtful and careful about choosing whether to become parents in the first place.

The centre has also been attacked for allegedly discriminating against heterosexual couples. Religious critics, smarting from their defeats in court in denying the equal provision of goods and services to LGBT people have rushed to judgement. But Natalie and Ashling insist that their service is open to all, as it must be.

Talking to them one is struck by how responsible and professional they are. All the appropriate medical checks and screening are done and although the service they offer is not free there is a strong sense that they are motivated by altruism, as indeed seems to be case with the sperm donors - gay and straight - who register with them. The couple acknowledge that they do not have expertise in surrogacy and so they refer gay men who approach them to other agencies.

Interviewing them, I discovered that they had been turned away by a vicar they had asked to christen their children (for cultural reasons). I was able to point them in the direction of the British Humanist Association and their baby-naming ceremonies.

They also expressed willingness to address one of GALHA's London meetings, where I am sure they would be very welcome.



Ashling Phillips and Natalie Drew
(Photo Malcolm Trahearn)

Editor's Notes

Apple in trouble

The giant American corporation Apple, now bigger than Microsoft, provokes extreme reactions: adoration among Macintosh evangelists and the millions of devoted iPhone, iPod and iPad users - and suspicion, even hatred among those concerned about Apple's monopolistic tendencies. It's a bit like the Catholic Church, as Umberto Eco, the Italian philosopher once observed. His reasoning was that, like Rome, Apple offered a guaranteed route to salvation - the Apple Way - provided one stuck to it. PC users, on the other hand, like Protestants, had to take personal responsibility for working out their own routes to heaven. You can't install anything on an Apple device that hasn't had the prior approval of the Apple management. If you break the rules, iTunes will not let you sync. In effect you will be - excommunicated.

Such power carries with it great responsibility. And this is what has infuriated many in the LGBT world recently. The social facility of Grindr is very welcome, but not so an iPhone app launched with the blessing of the Catholic Church. The app, £1.19 from the iTunes store, guides Catholics through confession and allows 'a personalised examination of conscience for each user'. Among the questions users are asked is: 'Have I been guilty of any homosexual activity?' It's no surprise that Catholics are supposed to feel guilty about their 'intrinsic disorder', but Apple seems to be facilitating and furthering a kind of cyber abuse.

The recent arrival of a 'gay-cure' app in the store led to an even more furious response. Given a 4+ approval rating by Apple, indicating it contained 'no objectionable content', the app promised 'freedom from homosexuality through the power of Jesus' and was backed by Exodus International, a Christian group that describes itself as 'the world's largest worldwide ministry to those struggling with unwanted same-sex attraction'. 146,000 people protested in a petition to Apple and Dr Gary Remafedi, director of the Youth

and Aids Projects, and specialist in adolescent medicine, complained that Exodus had distorted his research into homosexuality. He wrote to Apple requesting that they drop the app, saying that it 'erroneously cites my research in support of claims that homosexuality can be changed ... Associating my work with that of the ex-gay ministry and other unfounded treatments is professionally injurious and grievous.' Apple pulled the app, without comment.

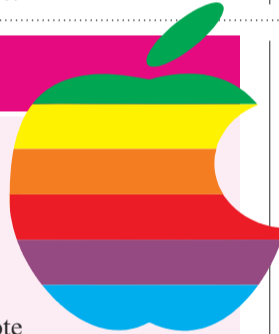
All this makes one relieved that the popular idea that the company's bitten-apple logo, formerly in rainbow colours, is a reference to Alan Turing is an urban myth. Turing committed suicide in 1954 by taking a bite from a cyanide-laced apple. A national hero, he was persecuted by laws inspired by the mentality behind the Apple apps. Perhaps what we need is a Humanist app, one that makes the iPhone screech at you if you do something that detracts from the general happiness, or swear by a non-existent deity...

Evangelicals fall out

The Evangelical Alliance has disowned the tactics of the Christian Legal Centre in bringing to court unsuccessful cases, such as those of the Islington registrar, the Derby Pentecostal foster parents and the discriminating Cornish B and B owners. They have tried to get judges to overthrow equality law, which they reasonably decline to do. In a sharply critical statement the group says: 'It is highly questionable whether British courts of law should be used as forums for debating the pros and cons of conflicting human rights created by equalities legislation. Instead, they should only be used to resolve disputed points of law based on evidence. The Evangelical Alliance expresses doubt about the wisdom in bringing such cases to the High Court in the first place.'

Humanists would agree there.

Malcolm Trahearn



Sports Stars venturing out of the Closet and a new Equalities Charter

There have recently been welcome signs that at last more LGBT sports stars are finding the courage to come out.

In 2009, Gareth Thomas, Welsh rugby international, took the step. An outstanding player, who holds the national appearance record (100 caps) and has scored 40 tries for his country, he was fearful of his colleagues' reactions. He need not have been; they were wholly positive. Now nearly at the end of his career, Thomas admitted he could not have come out earlier, before he had built his distinguished reputation.

Not so, the brilliant young England batsman-wicket keeper Steven Davies, who, at the start of what should be a wonderful career in international cricket, has chosen to come out - but again with the full support of family, team-mates and supporters. The decision to out himself may encourage other gay sportsmen not to hide their sexuality simply because they fear what might happen. Nothing will. Team-mate Ian Bell, said it all: 'He is a very popular guy in our team. He is a fantastic cricketer and that is what we see him as.'

In football there is only one top-flight openly gay player the young Swedish midfielder Anton Hysén, born in Liverpool. He has 'UNWA' tattooed on his left arm. 'You'll never walk alone' is the terrace anthem of the club.

Coming out publicly he said 'It is completely strange, isn't it? It's all fucked up. Where the hell are all the others? No one is coming out.'

LGBT footballers may recall the tragedy of Justin Fashanu, who revealed he was gay in 1990, found himself shunned by the footballing world, including his brother, John, and hanged himself eight years later.

The problem is the homophobia endemic in football. Ipswich supporters still repeat:

"He's gay, he's dead, he's hanging in a shed, Fashanu, Fashanu" at fans of Norwich, where Fashanu began his career. Such ugly prejudice on the terraces easily translates into homophobic bullying in schools, where football-mad teenagers consider their cruelty justified.

GALHA is glad to see that the Government is taking a stand on this. Equalities Minister Lynne

Featherstone has launched an LGBT charter in Sport. The charter will invite national governing bodies of sports to commit to tackling homophobia and transphobia and making sport 'a welcoming environment for LGBT people'. Featherstone said: 'Homophobia and transphobia have no place in sport and I'm delighted that so many sporting bodies are backing our campaign to stamp it out at all levels; from local parks to Olympic stadiums.'

The theme of LGBT History Month 2011 and 2012 is sport. Co-chair Tony Fenwick was proud of their achievements in the first year, which culminated in a widely publicised and supported Rugby league game in which players wore shirts bearing the slogan 'Homophobia - Tackle It'. He said: 'History Month went into extra time for this final fixture. All the players and fans I spoke to were completely supportive. The charter is just what we need to help sport move forward into the Olympic year.'



Anton Hysén



Join GALHA's Facebook Group

Do you have a Facebook account? If so, you may be pleased to know that GALHA now has its own virtual community online. Login to Facebook at www.facebook.com and search for "GALHA".



Corrections

John Sentamu is the Archbishop of York, not Durham.

Sue Robson's omitted committee responsibility is Diversity and Regional Groups. Apologies to Sue (left).

If the Archbishop is one of our readers, apologies to him too.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

All meetings will now be held with disabled access on the ground floor of Conway Hall.

'International LGBT Rights in an age of Religious Fundamentalism'

Friday May 13th 7.30pm.

We are marking International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHO), www.dayagainsthomophobia.org, with a panel discussion which will address how to effectively campaign for International LGBT Rights.

Panellists:

Adrian Tippetts. Journalist and Campaigner. 'LGBT Rights in the UK are being traded off in favour of the religious lobby'.

Anne Marie Waters. Anne-Marie Hutchinson OBE, the pre-eminent international children lawyer, who was awarded an OBE for her work in forced marriage and child abduction. She specialises in LGBT clients forced into marriage by their families for religious and cultural reasons, in international surrogacy, adoption and alternative family law.

Marco Tranchino. Central London Humanists Campaigns Officer and Organiser of the Secular Europe Campaign. 'Top levels of the Catholic Church via the Vatican and the United Nations are still fiercely opposing Gay Rights'.

Michael Bochenek. Director of Law and Policy, Amnesty International.

Tony Green. Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement. 'The solution to faith based homophobia is people of faith working out what their traditions really say about the dignity of human beings and their responsibility towards another'.

IDAHO 2012

Friday 10th June 7.30pm

This is a planning meeting to which representatives from all LGBT organisations will be invited. Next year's structure, organisation, etc. will be discussed. Among the speakers, Louis Georges Tin will talk about how IDAHO is evolving internationally.

'Objections to Humanism'

Friday 8th July 7.30 pm

Andrew Copson, Executive Director of British Humanist Association, will be presenting a number of frequently expressed objections to the principles on which Humanism is based and demonstrating the fallacy of each.

AUGUST

No meeting.

Annual General Meeting

Saturday 1st October 2-6pm.

Conway Hall. Red Lion Square. Holborn.

During the afternoon there will be a performance of Vinyl Closet 2, an entertainment by Ted Brown and Brett Lock

Annual Lunch

Saturday 12th November 12.30pm

(venue to be announced)

Guest of Honour Johann Hari, journalist

Johann Hari to be Guest of Honour at 2011 GALHA Lunch

Johann Hari is an award-winning journalist who writes twice-weekly for the Independent, one of Britain's leading newspapers, and the Huffington Post. He also writes for the New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, Le Monde, Le Monde Diplomatique, The New Republic, El Mundo, The Guardian, The Melbourne Age, the Sydney Morning Herald, South Africa's Star, The Irish Times, Attitude and a wide



Johann Hari speaking at Protest the Pope 2010
Photo: Lewishamdreamer

range of other international newspapers and magazines. The date and venue for the lunch is to be confirmed.



As we go to press, the William and Kate wedding – and a national holiday – approaches. GALHA wishes the royal couple well. Like all couples committing to a long-term relationship they deserve our support. We hope they will note, however, that LGBT people do not enjoy the option to marry. They have only the possibility of civil partnerships, which offer just a measure of equality. A recent survey has shown that 61% of the public believe that 'Gay couples should have an equal right to get married, not just to have civil partnerships.' Only 33% disagreed.

GALHA supports the Equal Love campaign, which seeks to end sexual orientation discrimination in both civil marriage and civil partnership law.



Lady Gaga's Born this Way censored

What Elton John has called 'the new gay anthem' for its explicit celebration of LGBT identity has been censored in predominately Muslim Malaysia. Fans will not hear on the radio the words: 'No matter gay, straight or bi, lesbian, transgendered life, I'm on the right track, baby.' The American pop singer-songwriter has criticised the stations, but they say they are being cautious as the Malaysian government forbids 'offensive' material.

The singer has also pulled the plug on a lucrative marketing deal with major U.S. retailer Target, just weeks before an exclusive version of Born This Way, was to hit stores. Her decision is said to be based on the company's failure to renounce its support

for politicians that oppose gay rights.

In a very welcome development the singer has announced that she is donating the proceeds from the country version of her song to an anti-bullying charity.

Editor's Note: Gaga's support for gay rights is welcome, but in *Born This Way* I was less happy with: *I'm beautiful in my way, / 'Cause God makes no mistakes / I'm on the right track, baby / I was born this way*

And a bit worried about: *A different lover is not a sin / Believe capital H-I-M (hey, hey, hey)!*

Rejoice the truth / In the religion of the insecure / I must be myself, respect my youth sounds profound, if a little obscure.

Two enthusiastic reactions on Meetup to the March meeting

'Equal Rights' - are we there yet?
A talk by Peter Tatchell.



Russell: 'What a lucid, coherent, confident and accessible public speaker Peter Tatchell has become. His contemporary, tireless, methodical campaigning was, as I listened, awash with his presence in the tainted nostalgia of my own life, navigating and confronting homophobia over the years; from seeing him berated on TV at 70's by-elections when I was a teenager and marching with him against clause 28 in the 80's to his continuing rocking of the boat through the decades of uppity queerness. An icon.'

Jon Clarke: 'I can only echo Russell's comments! Peter is always a joy to listen to. He provides a clear, calm analysis of what is, and is not, the truth about our struggle for equality with successive ostensibly "liberal" governments, and about how much more we have yet to achieve. A great evening! Tx'