



# ***PFLAG***

**Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians and Gays**

**Conference June 2004  
Rydges Hotel  
Sydney NSW**

***‘Combating Rural  
Homophobia’***

# **Agenda**

## **Day One**

**Saturday June 11<sup>th</sup> 2004**

**Welcome address from Rudy Vanderhart, President Western Sydney PFLAG who declared the conference open.**

**Housekeeping details were given by Narelle Phipps, Western Sydney PFLAG. Narelle formally thanked the Attorney General's Department for their contribution in assisting to make this conference happen.**

**Narelle read the letter of support and acknowledgement from Justice Michael Kirby.**

### **1. Facilitator: Daniel Madeddu**

Daniel acknowledged the commitment and work done by the Conference Planning Committee and acknowledged the Owners of the Land, the Gadigal People.

Daniel introduced to all the concept of ideas, actions and recommendations that would be fostered, expressed and brought forth through the conference program.

### **2. Keynote Address: Linda Burney Member of Parliament**

Some of the main highlights of Linda's speech were to do with themes of social justice and rights. She spoke about the importance of the evolution of the country and to consider its layers of stories, layers of tolerance and intolerance and the layers of migration. She spoke about the importance of recognizing diversity through tolerance, education and understanding. She shared her own personal story of growing up in a small country town in NSW and how small towns can generate painful, hurtful experiences for those who might be 'different'.

Linda also shared her observation that the general level of openness and good tolerance we have known in our country seemed to be slowly shutting down in recent times.

To meet this challenge she talked about the importance of strengthening communities and networks and encouraged all to actively participate on community consultative committees and such organizations as Chambers of Commerce. She thought that infiltrating into main stream organizations was an important way to communicate the concerns and issues of PFLAG. Linda also suggested that continued, open dialogue with local councils and local members are important avenues for the communication of these issues.

### **3. Guest Speaker: Louise Thatcher**

Louise shared her personal story and experiences growing up as a young lesbian in a small rural town in NSW. Her story revolved mostly around her experiences at school.

Her speech generated questions about why she left to go to Sydney and means of support through schools for young people who experience prejudice and harassment.

The web site Mogenic.com was provided as an example of virtual support for young people (under 25yrs) to use as a means of connection with other young lesbians and gays.

### **4. Group Reports: Day One**

All the group reports (day one and day two) talked about the importance of confidentiality and a relaxed informal and supportive environment as core to their group. Most groups talked about developing and/or gathering many forms of information/educational resources and establishing borrowing libraries as part of their work. Most groups invited guest speakers to their meetings. The speakers reported on the membership numbers, which overall they thought to be relatively low and how this can be disheartening at times. The speakers reported on their finance and budgets, which for many were relatively small and relied on the goodwill of members.

#### **Port Macquarie Jean Rideout**

Jean reported that their PFLAG group was a social and support group. They had support from the Uniting Church minister which they thought was important. They have many resources available and a promotion booklet will be launched for the Hastings area on July 16<sup>th</sup>.

#### **Gunnedah Val Harris and Faye Heywood**

Faye acknowledged Bernie from the local Sexual Health Service for his continued support and enthusiasm. The group advertises over 4 radio stations and also through the local newspapers. They have several current projects including the sexual diversity policy (NEAHS), church contacts, training for volunteers for HIV/AIDS patients and a questionnaire around statistics of gay and lesbian people. There was a suggestion that their questionnaire may be assisted through the research centre at LaTrobe University on a report titled 'Sex in Australia'.

#### **Bathurst Tony Sutton Summary Report tabled**

The group identified the importance of social gatherings which have assisted in maintaining their survival over the past 10 years. The group recently attended a 2 day workshop on 'Accidental Counselling' which was sponsored by Mid Western Area Health. They have been

working with assisting the local Low Security Prison Camp to meet the needs of a gay inmate. The group has been active in supporting parents of gay children, at the Shalom House of Prayer in Carcoar to support parents struggling with the conflict of their Christian values.

## **Western Sydney Mollie Smith**

Mollie acknowledged the important support of ACON and the MCC Church to their group. She reminded everyone of the importance of the need to be listed in the local phone directory and to note business and after hour contact numbers. Mollie reported that their group informs the Community Health Centres and Sexual Health Clinics about PFLAG. Mollie believes that the secret to success is through commitment, hard work and enthusiasm. She also highlighted the need to continue to thank people for their input and assistance.

## **5. Guest Speaker: Somali Cerise The Anti-Violence Project**

Somali gave a brief history of the founding and establishment of the Anti-Violence Project (AVP) which began in 1991. The core grant of funding is from the NSW Department of Health with some additional funding from the Attorney General's Department.

The project was established in response to street violence and has developed many resources and campaigns aimed at anti-homophobia education and awareness. She reported on the types of violence committed, such as drink spiking and harassment, and of homophobic hate crimes. She reported that although the level of violence is unchanged, gay and lesbian people generally feel more confident in reporting to the police. This is in part due to the development of Gay and Lesbian Advocacy Officer positions in the NSW police service.

Somali's presentation generated many questions and discussion. Most of the discussion was in relation to education in schools, how effective are the GLLO positions and how do Australian statistics around homophobic hate crime compare to other parts of the world.

Somali gave the report a true sense of reality by highlighting one young gay man's personal experience and by reminding everyone of the long term mental and physical effects that such acts can have on an individual.

## **6. Guest Speaker: Jackie Braw Policy Officer Gay & Lesbian Liaison Crime Prevention Division, Attorney General's Department**

Jackie encouraged everyone to be aware of and to apply for grants from the Attorney Generals Department. She provided examples such as this conference, reducing violence and abuse and supporting victims, as opportunities to secure funding.

She reported on the Anti-homophobia Interagency Round Table initiative which will occur over the next few years across NSW.

**7. Guest Speaker: Liz Hammond**  
**Senior Health Education Officer**  
**FPA Health**

Liz reported on several initiatives conducted by FPA Health to assist in combating rural homophobia. These included, Affirming Sexual Diversity, Same Difference Program, Panel/speaker training, Advocacy & Policy Development and presenting at forums.

Liz reported on the Rural Road Show that had been conducted in the New England Area. Her report outlined that the success of the Road Show was due partly to a multidisciplinary approach, a clear project plan and an evaluation.

Questions generated from the previous two speakers were in relation to why have the school talks/panels dropped off, and the availability of the 'green booklet' for all teachers.

**8. Attorney General's Department Workshop**  
**Combating Rural Homophobia**  
**Facilitator: Daniel Maddedu**

The group spent the afternoon focusing on ways that PFLAG can contribute to combating homophobia at a local level. The basic structure of the workshop addressed the following three questions:

1. What are the significant issues that affect your ability to work as a PFLAG group and combat homophobia within your area?
2. What is your vision of an ideal future for gay men, lesbians and their parents and friends in your area?
3. How are you going to get there? What are the resources and strategies that you need in place to achieve this vision?

The finished workshop report will be available on the Western Sydney PFLAG website as soon as it's available.

**Day One was completed by an evening of pre dinner drinks, entertainment by the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Choir, and was then followed by dinner.**

## **Day Two**

### **June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2004**

#### **Facilitator: Mollie Smith**

##### **1. Group Reports: Day Two**

###### **Penrith**

###### **Vicki and Aldolfo Gonzales**

Vicki reported that the group has remained small in numbers. They actively advertise through local papers. This group highlighted the importance of considering the special needs of those from different countries and cultures, and who may not speak English.

###### **Brisbane**

###### **Shelley Argent**

Shelley acknowledged the wonderful and professional support received from ACON. Shelley reported on the importance of maintaining informal social gatherings and being listed in the local telephone directory. Shelley reported that they have been able to generate a newsletter which has been a good source to inform people throughout Queensland. Shelley reported that the group has developed a CD of information that is easy to mail out to those in more isolated areas. Shelley also spoke of the importance of lobbying and that they regularly write to church groups, the papers and local government.

###### **Melbourne**

###### **Nan McGregor**

###### **Report tabled**

The Melbourne group is based at the Victorian AIDS Council and has been active since 1993. Nan reports that the Melbourne group has a very good membership of approximately 100. The group produces a monthly newsletter and maintain a speakers bureau. The group is actively involved in many initiatives such as; representation on a reference group with the Victoria Police, representation on the State Attorney General's reference group and representation on the gay and lesbian reference group of the Equal Opportunities Commission of Victoria. Nan reported that the group are active fund raising campaigners and receive donations from some organizations. A web site has been set up ([www.gayfamilysupport.com](http://www.gayfamilysupport.com)) by Debbie Curran at the Bendigo chapter. Nan highlighted the limited support services in rural Victoria and the importance of setting clear guidelines in the group constitution for anyone who wants to establish a PFLAG group.

**Hobart**  
**Els MacIntosh**  
**Report tabled**

Els reported on the difficult circumstances faced by PFLAG in Tasmania. Homophobia is still alive and well and many parents are frightened to come forward. Els reported on the competition for government funding among agencies, the possible creation of an NGO client-counsellor model and the threat of NGOs taking over the functions of a PFLAG group were of great concern.

**Mosman**  
**Maree Lau**

Marie reported on how the group was established only 2 years ago. She was encouraged by local police to secure some available funding which would assist in establishing the new group. The group is now based at the Youth Development Centre in Mosman. Marie reported that the group advertises in local papers and also utilizes an educational tape that can easily be posted by mail. Marie reminded everyone of the core business which is 'to keep families together' and to try to be as accessible as possible. Marie thought that it may be a good idea to participate on the International Pride Day march on June 28<sup>th</sup>.

**Northern Rivers**  
**Richard Grzelzulka**  
**Report tabled**

The group has been established since 1998 and was successful in securing considerable funding from an Area Assistance Grant to get the group going. Richard reported that this funding is only available in some rural areas. The group has a dedicated telephone line and advertises in local papers. Richard reported on a very supported and well attended launch, but with little eventual outcome in relation to increasing membership. Richard also reported that the group had reached out to support local gay men who were 'coming out' at later stages in their lives, as no other support was available to them within their local area.

**2. Open Group Discussion: What is PFLAG's purpose and role?**

Everyone worked in different groups to brainstorm this question. Many ideas and observations were generated. The key areas are:

Getting started:

- § How to get started can be assisted by help from ACON and advertising locally.

Sustainability and growth:

- § Securing funding and income by grants, raffles, street stalls, donations, subscriptions and memberships.
- § Forming partnerships with Health Services, Universities, advocacy groups
- § Need for a 'federal body'
- § Greater visibility through all forms of media, possibly TV

- § Learn how to write funding submissions

Achieving success:

- § Love, enthusiasm, from the heart, hard work, determination, passion
- § Commitment to social justice
- § Personal contact, willingness to listen and change
- § Taking affirmative positive action
- § Confidentiality, non threatening environments

Nurturing others and ourselves:

- § Caring for the carers
- § Debriefing
- § Support for burnout
- § Self awareness- be sensitive to the needs of others, especially new members

Education:

- § Identifying homophobia and changing kids' attitudes
- § Need to be involved on speaker panels in schools
- § Be proactive and contact school counselors
- § Public speaking
- § More links with web sites
- § Work more closely with school librarians
- § Invite school principals to meetings

Key Partners:

- § ACON, Lifeline, AIDSline, Police, Gay & Lesbian Lobby Groups, FPA Health, Uniting Church, Womens Health, local councils, Gay & Lesbian Help Line, Area Health Services.

Future Directions:

- § Investigate getting incorporated as a national group
- § Focus on indigenous youth and gay men- broaden objectives
- § More literature, books available in schools
- § Collaboration and coordination of resources, projects, initiatives
- § Get funding
- § PFLAG march or Picnic Day on its own, not just in Mardi Gras

### **3. Guest Speaker: Bernie Green New England Area Health Service**

Bernie provided a history of his involvement as a staff member of the Sexual Health Centre, with the local PFLAG group. Bernie reported on the many innovative projects that have been generated due to a strong partnership approach. The Sexual Health Service supports the PFLAG group in many ways such as, venue, payment for advertising, and assistance with the provision of resources. Bernie reported on the difficulties in making contact and setting up groups within smaller communities in the New England area and provided ideas that may assist others in this challenging undertaking

**4. Guest Speaker: Bruno Diodati**  
**Gender Equity Unit**  
**Department of Education and Training**

Bruno shared his own personal experiences of growing up from a culturally and linguistically diverse background, and the prejudice he experienced as a young boy at school.

Bruno presented on the 'Gender Equity Strategy' that is an important component of NSW educational policy and is part of the curriculum in schools. The main theme of the training package is challenging macho and machismo attitudes that can limit the participation and performance of some boys at school.

Bruno involved the group in one of the activities that is part of the interactive workshop of the strategy called, Corey's Story.

Copies of Bruno's power point presentation were made available and for any other reference need contact:

[www.schools.nsw.edu.au/gender](http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/gender)

**5. Guest Speaker: David Toolan**  
**Coordinator Gay & Lesbian Officers Program**  
**NSW Police Service**

David talked about the NSW police service commitment to upskill the police on homophobia issues. The aim of David's program is to increase the awareness of the needs of gay, lesbian and transgender people, increase the sensitivity around this issue among the police and to promote a cultural shift within the organisation.

David answered questions about the GLLO's and the importance of their positions were seen as very significant amongst the group.

David made a handout of his presentation available.

**6. Sally Abrahams**  
**Manager Twenty 10**

Sally reported that the main point of focus for her organization is homelessness among gay, lesbian, transgender or bisexual young people. Twenty 10 is an early intervention program which aims to assist these young people who are in serious difficulty to secure safe, supported accommodation. Sally informed the group that posters and pamphlets were available.

Russell D a worker from Twenty 10 shared his own personal story as a young gay man growing up in a small rural farming community.

## **7. Guest Speaker: Sonny Williams ACON West**

Sonny presented on his work with HIV Positive inmates from across the Western Sydney area. These men have been recently released from gaol and require support and assistance with living needs and other resources and information.

On behalf of Daryl Williams, the head of ACON, Sonny assured the members of their commitment to support and encourage existing and potential new PFLAG groups.

## **8. Conference Summary Keith Phipps Western Sydney PFLAG**

Keith quoted Margaret Mead to lead and introduce the concepts for the summary of the two day conference.

*'If ever things are to be achieved it is by a small group of people working with a purpose'.*

There was much discussion among all group members about the need to move forward and further develop future directions. It was noted that 12 PFLAG groups cease to exist since 1999 and that a coordinated approach should be the way forward to build strength and unity among existing groups.

It was recommended that;

- § PFLAG would need to unite to strengthen and ensure continued sustainability and effectiveness.
- § That movement towards creating a federal body commence
- § The setting up of a state structure that supports the development and advances the aims and role of PFLAGs in NSW
- § That a Steering Committee be established to oversee the planning for the way forward
- § That one person from each existing group would be nominated as a representative to the Steering Committee
- § To source avenues of funding to support the above initiative
- § To secure someone with appropriate skills to write any funding submissions for the above initiatives. (Keith agreed to be this person as he has some expertise in this area)
- § That one of the purposes of the funding would be to employ someone to coordinate the Steering Committee, create the Terms of Reference and assist in developing a Mission Statement.

**Closing comments and thank you to all from Narelle Phipps**

