



NEWRY RAINBOW COMMUNITY

ANNUAL REPORT

2013 / 2014



Since our last Annual General Meeting the Newry Rainbow Community has continued to deliver services, develop new initiatives and projects and to consolidate the significant progress that has been achieved for the lgb&t community in Newry City and surrounding areas since the opening of a dedicated lgb&t drop-in, information and resource centre on Hill Street Newry in September 2010. The NRC Centre has now been operating for four years and is now beginning to realise the potential that that created by increasing the visibility of the NRC as an organisation and of lgb&t people in general, creating a more vibrant, confident and focused lgb&t community locally.

This Report highlights some of the major achievements and initiatives undertaken in the past fifteen months.

Services, projects and programmes delivered

The NRC Centre has continued to deliver a comprehensive range of information, support and services to lgb&t people and their families and friends through for example, personal development courses; advocacy and referrals; signposting; befriending service; professional counselling; rapid HIV testing; sexual health advice; movie nights; training courses in web design and movie making; organised mystery tours; themed evenings e.g. women's nights and a Youth Group and internet access & printing.

PASSION

Our monthly social night for lgb&t people successfully continues on the first Saturday of each month in the Bellagio Suite at Bellins Newry.

NAME Film Club

We have continued with Newry's new alternative movie experience – a monthly social opportunity for lgb&t people to meet up and enjoy watching a movie in a safe comfortable environment. With the latest equipment offering a large screen and surround sound the NRC provide screenings of feature-length films, shorts and unusual offerings with a LGB or T focus. Over the coming year we will be screening a wide selection of documentaries, short films and full-length movies with a LGB or T twist, from old classics to arty new ones. NAME is open to anyone with a keen interest in films and affords lgb&t people an opportunity to meet in a safe, welcoming environment.

CFNI Social Justice Project / NRC Women's Group

Whilst applying the Social Justice model to our work, the Newry Rainbow Community, facilitated by a Community Foundation for N.I. mentor, uncovered a number of challenges for the organisation as a whole. Not least of these was the very limited participation of women in their activities. An action plan was drawn up to promote the centre and the work of the group to women in general, but lesbian, bisexual and transgender women in particular. As a result, a Women's Support Group has been initiated and supported to develop. Three women are now members of the Newry Rainbow management committee. The centre now holds a weekly Women's Night, both informational and social, portable play materials have been purchased by the parent and child sub-group and women have recorded their experiences of growing up as a lesbian or bisexual woman in the Newry area for inclusion in *Gay Newry Voices*. The NRC Women's Group has also had a very visible presence as part of Pride in Newry for the first time this year.



Dedicated Outreach Worker

The Rainbow Project has recruited a part time lgb&t Outreach Officer for the Southern Health and Social Care Trust area. The aim of the Post is to promote the health and wellbeing of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people and their families in the Southern Trust Area. Through the post we have been able to deliver personal development programmes, workshops and courses that promote emotional health and wellbeing to LGB&T people and their families; individual and group work support; a volunteer led mentoring and befriending scheme targeting LGB&T people and their families; a Southern Area specific crisis response protocol for at risk clients and an assertively out-reach to lgb&t people in the Southern Area to ensure appropriate access to support services

SAIL

We have continued to work closely with SAIL (Support, Acceptance, Information and Learning) a voluntary support group for family, friends, carers and individuals living with gender issues.

IDAHO

On May 17th 2013 the NRC in partnership with Changing Attitude Ireland the NRC organized a ground breaking IDAHO night in the Dominican Church in Newry.



Fr Joseph Ralph, OP Dominican Church Newry and Canon Charles Kenny, former Vicar Choral, St Anne's Cathedral Belfast presided over a Prayer Evening of Sacred Song and Reflection to mark the International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia. It was a truly very special and wonderfully uplifting night.

Pride in Newry

Having a dedicated Centre has enabled the NRC to work strategically and in partnership with a range of organisations, and the security it provided in terms of an operational base was instrumental in the Management Committee of the NRC deciding to initiate the first Pride in Newry festival and parade in September 2012.

This was a major undertaking and a monumental event in the life of Newry City. Pride in Newry created a broad platform to showcase the diversity of communities and cultures in Newry City. It has enable the NRC to increase the visibility of the NRC as an organisation and to portray lgb&t people in a positive way, breaking down barriers and stereotypes and promoting the integration and participation of lgb&t people in all aspects of the wider community and civic life of Newry.



The Launch of Pride in Newry

The week-long Pride festival in September 2013, saw a wide range of activities take place across the city but the undoubted highlight of the week was the Pride Parade through Newry city Centre and the Party in the Park concert at McClelland Park. Featuring floats, music, costumes and walkabout circus performers, the parade brought a carnival of colour and sparkle to the streets of Newry.

Speaking at the launch Newry Rainbow Community Chairman Rory Rafferty commented, "We believe that the festival will be a successful major public event that can attract thousands of people into Newry City centre to participate in and view the parade concert and outdoor entertainment and that the economic benefit of this event will convince local businesses and Newry & Mourne District Council to support and expand the event in future years making it an important major annual event in the tourism package of Newry & Mourne."



Equality Commissioner Anna Carragher speaking at the launch of the Pride in Newry Festival said “This is about exactly what it says – pride in our city. It’s about celebrating the people, places and progress of Newry and we would love to see the city come out in force and support the event together, as the proud people we are.”

Mayor John McArdle said he was delighted to be at the launch representing the people of Newry and Mourne. Commenting that “Newry has changed so much in this past ten years – not least because of its City status, and our city is so much more diverse now and we as a Council recognise and value the contribution that the NRC and our lgb&t community make to enhancing our City and society”



Launching the Pride in Newry festival and parade

PRIDE 2014

In August 2014 the Newry Rainbow Community has consolidated the enormous success of the inaugural Pride in Newry festival of 2012 and once again have delivered a truly spectacular parade and festival for the people of Newry City. The Pride in Newry Parade, Festival and Outdoor Concert for its second year was bigger and better and again saw thousands of people take to the streets to participate in and support the lgb&t community and our friends and families, enjoying a day filled with colour, pageant, music, fun and happiness.

Stormont Junior Minister Jennifer McCann again attended and speaking following the paraded stated that said events like the Newry Pride 'encourage people to take pride in who they are and they help lesbian, gay and bisexual people, as well as transgender people, become more visible in our society. Festivals such as Pride in Newry put into practice the idea that diversity should be celebrated'.

She added "We need to foster this pride and visibility so that young lgb&t people don't feel alienated or frightened in school or in their local community. We want to make sure all people, young or old, should be proud of their sexuality, and gender, and don't think they have to hide it from the people around them, including their colleagues and neighbours."



Launching Pride in Newry 2013 were from left: Conor Murphy MP; Rory, Rafferty, Chairman, Newry Rainbow Community; Mickey Ruane, Mayor, Newry and Mourne District Council; Mickey Brady MLA, and Damian McKeivitt, NRC



Mayor of Newry & Mourne District Council Mickey Ruane, with Pride in Newry organisers at the launch of Pride in Newry 2014.



Mayor Mickey Ruane with Rory Rafferty, Chairman, Newry Rainbow Community at the launch of 2013 Pride in Newry.

Working towards continued progress

In 2013 / 2014 the NRC has worked to build relationships both within the lgb&t community and between the lgb&t community and wider society through lobbying, advocacy, awareness-raising activities and the development of social and networking opportunities for lgb&t people. The Pride In Newry festival and parades in September 2012 and just recently in August 2014 have borne witness to the increasing visibility and confidence of lgb&t people and to the increasing awareness and support that they have in the wider civic, political and community sectors of Newry.

The NRC will continue at every opportunity to publicly raise awareness of lgb&t issues and to portray lgb&t people in a positive way, breaking down barriers and stereotypes and promoting the integration and participation of lgb&t people in all aspects of the wider community and civic life of Newry.

Since the opening of the NRC Centre the NRC has greatly increased the visibility, confidence and capacity of LGB&T people, and developed and maintained strong supporting relationships with the wider community, voluntary and statutory sectors across the Newry & Mourne and Southern Health Trust areas.

We believe that things have really changed for the better in the lives of the local lgb&t community in Newry compared to even just a few years ago. When people who went away from Newry because it wasn't a comfortable place to be for them, tell you that it has changed so much for the better and that it's in no small way due to the efforts of the Newry Rainbow Community maybe it is time to sit and reflect on how far we have come in a few short years. While the NRC certainly couldn't claim all the glory in a society that is changing as a whole, it is time to recognise that what the NRC has been doing over the past number of years is actually now making a real difference to people on the ground and goes a long way towards banishing the bad days of uncertainty, isolation and fear so many lgb&t people have experienced and endured over years and decades.

The NRC has already realised considerable short term achievements and successes and is highly regarded as an extremely credible and accountable organisation by all main statutory and voluntary organisations in Newry. The continued provision of a dedicated Centre for lgb&t people is of paramount importance and will deliver long term outcomes and benefits that will make a lasting impact on their lives and their life opportunities.

Rory Rafferty

RORY RAFFERTY

Chairman

4th October 2014