

Exciting Events in the West Midlands.

The first two months of the year have been very busy. Irene and I began in January with two more mornings of talks to students and staff in year twelve at Birmingham Ormiston Academy.

Then she and I on a snowy evening, attended the launch of the new LGB&T Health and Education Centre in Birmingham at Holloway Circus. This centre, four years in planning and building and funded by the Lottery, brings us into line with other cities which have had LGB&T centres for years. Drinks and nibbles were provided. Birmingham Councillor Steve Bedser the Labour and Co-operative Councillor for King's Norton spoke, as did Dave Viney and Steph Keeble, whose dream this was come to completion. Entertaining singers were Faye Bagley and Sarah Kate Bennett. The building is beautifully decorated and has excellent facilities, such as a training room, counselling rooms, a health clinic room and a meeting room which can be used free of charge by the LGB&T community. There is an integral café which can be hired for social events and an office with computer facilities for the community.

Then on February 1st I went with my son to the opening event of LGB&T History Month in Redditch. Bromsgrove and Redditch are the only two towns in Worcestershire which celebrate LGB&T History Month. We work in partnership with other community organisations under the auspices of the efficient Equality and Diversity Officer from Bromsgrove District Council who energises and organises us all. The first event in Redditch was to launch the production of a new DVD to draw attention to Hate Crime. It is called "Break the Cycle" and is produced by and performed by young people using real-life stories from the LGB&T and ethnic minority communities. It will be used by the police in schools to inform about the effects of hate crime against all minorities, including LGB&T people. Again, Dave Viney was the main speaker, who told us about recent mental health studies of the gay community and the dire statistics regarding self harm in the gay population compared with the general population. He also spoke about the importance of family support for gay people.

This was followed on February 7th by a grand social evening at the Artrix arts centre in Bromsgrove, including a free buffet supper. The theme this year was older LGB&T people, but younger people were welcome also and it was all publicised as family friendly. Here all the local charities and organisations sympathetic to the cause, set up stalls in the foyer, including mine for NewRoad Parents. The police were there with their Hate Incident reporting leaflets; the Pink Sou' Westers; F.A.B which is the group to support Gay and Lesbian parents. There was the NASUWT teachers' stall; Bromsgrove library with a selection of LGB books; the Gender Trust; the Worcester LGB&T youth group; Fever the Redditch nightclub which held a gay night on February 24th; the Bromsgrove District Housing Trust. (And apologies for others I have forgotten.) There was face-painting for the children – and rainbow motifs for some of the adults! Then

followed a welcome and introduction by the Civic Head of Bromsgrove District Council, Councillor Janice Boswell, before the free film, "Beginners" was shown which starred Ewan McGregor and Christopher Plummer. An enjoyable evening for all.

There were more events and films to follow in February. Throughout there was a display at Bromsgrove Artrix of photographs: "Otherness: Playing with Gender Representation," by John Rae, which showed challenging photographs of people present, portrayed side by side as both male and female with differing hairstyles, and clothing.

This was our fourth annual event in Bromsgrove and was the best attended. I personally find that I grow in confidence and comfortableness with each event and feel able to talk more openly with my friends, or even strangers, about having gay children. I recommend to other parents that they join in any local LGB&T events, to feel less isolated and more supported by the community to which their children belong.

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