



**NRC**



**NEWRY RAINBOW COMMUNITY**

**ANNUAL REPORT**

**2015 / 2016**

**ALL LOVE IS EQUAL**



**EQUAL MARRIAGE NOW!**

I am delighted to present this Annual Report of the activities and outcomes of the Newry Rainbow Community over the past year.

Since our last Annual General Meeting the Newry Rainbow Community has settled in well to our new premises on Monaghan Street, which has been re-branded as “Rainbow House” and which has been extensively re-furbished and now provides the highest quality facilities to deliver a wider range of supports and services to the lgb&t community in Newry City and surrounding areas.

2016 also witnessed another widely supported Pride In Newry festival and parade. This was the fifth year of what is now regarded as a major annual event in Newry City, and we will be celebrating this achievement in February 2017 with the first Pride In Newry Awards ceremony!

In the past year the NRC has continued to deliver services, developed new initiatives and projects and consolidated and built on 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 in September 2010. The NRC Centre has now been operating for over six years, and with new premises in a prominent location on Monaghan Street it has dramatically increased 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 these and other major achievements and initiatives undertaken by the NRC in the past twelve 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; health & wellbeing Yoga classes; movie nights; social events; organised mystery tour; a dedicated women’s group and a family support group, The Outlaws.

Rainbow House is now a base for the delivery of support through the Same-sex Family initiative being rolled out by The Rainbow Project and HereNI.

In another sign of progress the NRC was asked, as an integral element of a Personal Development Programme, to develop and deliver three Sexuality and Gender Identity awareness workshops to YEAR 12 pupils in St. Josephs Secondary Scholl in Newry City. This was an extremely important and successful engagement with both pupils and staff in one of Newry’s biggest schools. The inter-active sessions over three days were designed to help pupils to positively engage, in a safe and confidential environment, with sensitive issues around sexuality, gender and emotional wellbeing.

## Collaboration with other lgb&t organisations

We were delighted to welcome members of the recently established Drogheda lgb&t support group to Rainbow House in October 2016, when, through conversation, we were able to exchange our experience of the development of the NRC as an organisation and outline the practicalities of working towards the development of a dedicated support centre. We recognised their enthusiasm and passion for advancing support for lgb&t people in their area and will continue to engage with them to identify opportunities for future collaboration.

We have continued to work closely with SAIL (Support, Acceptance, Information and Learning) and GenderJAM who provide invaluable support for families, friends, carers and individuals living with gender issues, and both organisations now operate from the re-branded Rainbow House. We will continue to explore opportunities to work effectively in partnership with them on a broad range of issues including opportunities for joint lobbying and advocacy.



## IDAHO

In May 2016 Northern Ireland lgb&t Awareness Week included the annual International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia. The NRC held a night of sacred music, song and reflection, including scripture readings at St Catherine's Dominican Church, Newry. This was an up-lifting, positive and affirming event providing a unique and positive opportunity to promote engagement, inclusivity and acceptance, and demonstrates what can be achieved through the building of trusting relationships at local level.

# PRIDE IN NEWRY 2016!



Pride In Newry is a major undertaking and is now a landmark event in the life of Newry City. Pride in Newry has created a broad platform to showcase the diversity of communities and cultures in Newry City. It enables 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 week-long Pride festival in 2016, saw a wide range of activities take place across the city including political events, trade union events, events to support trans youth and promoting a campaign for marriage equality as well as social events such as Karaoke and Drag Bingo.

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, Samba Band and walkabout circus performers, the parade brought a carnival of colour and sparkle to the streets of Newry.

One local journalist commented “the atmosphere in Newry was electric as the 5<sup>th</sup> Pride In Newry got underway. The city centre came out in support of what was one of the most colourful and cultural events that I have ever had the pleasure to attend. It was an amazing free event for all the family to enjoy.”

The Pride In Newry festival is a successful major public event that attracts thousands of people into Newry City centre to participate in and view the parade, concert and outdoor entertainment, providing significant economic benefit to local businesses and is now an important major annual event in the tourism package of Newry Mourne and Down District.

The Pride in Newry Festival is exactly what it says – pride in our City. It’s about celebrating the people, places and progress of Newry City as it moves forward with confidence, truly valuing the diversity of all its people and communities. Newry has changed so much, particularly in the past ten years, and our City is so much more diverse now and we are very proud of the contribution the NRC and our lgb&t community has made to that change.

## **Working towards continued progress**

In 2015 / 2016 the NRC has continued our efforts to build relationships both within the lgb&t community and between the lgb&t community and wider society through increased visibility, lobbying, advocacy, awareness-raising activities and the development of social and networking opportunities for lgb&t people. The Pride In Newry festival and parade just recently in September has borne witness to the increasing visibility and confidence of lgb&t people and to the increasing awareness and support that they have within 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 Mourn and Down District.

And now with the improved facilities of our new Centre on Monaghan Street we have more momentum and determination than ever to comprehensively address the needs and wellbeing of lgb&t people.

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 reflect on how far we have come in a few short years. While the NRC certainly couldn't claim all the credit for this in a society that is changing as a whole, it is time to recognise that locally-based organisations such as the NRC can make a meaningful and real difference to people on the ground and the efforts of the NRC is making strong inroads 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 achievements and successes and is highly regarded as an extremely credible and accountable organisation by all main statutory and voluntary organisations in Newry, and across the political spectrum.

The continued existence of Rainbow House as 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.

*Damian McShane*

**DAMIAN McSHANE**

**Chairman**

29<sup>th</sup> November 2016

# In memoriam

12 June 2016

