

LGBTIA GROUP UPDATE OCTOBER 2017

It was a privilege for Shepherd and Wedderburn's LGBTIA Group to welcome Allison Ewing to our latest networking event held in our Glasgow office in September to speak on behalf of Mermaids UK, winner of the 2016 Community Organisation Award for LGBT at the National Diversity Awards.

Mermaids is a UK wide support group dedicated to raising awareness of gender nonconformity in children and to providing support to those adults who themselves provide support and care to trans-children, be they parents, teachers, social workers or health professionals. Despite a 400% increase in the demand for the support services offered by Mermaids UK since 2013/14, parents are often at a loss as to who to turn to and ask for guidance and support.

Allison also founded the TransparentSees peer-to-peer support group for parents and family members of gender questioning and transgender children. Allison gave a brave and inspiring talk based on her own personal journey as a parent. As she candidly put it, she had never thought that life would take her down the path of trans-activism, but faced with the reality of a teenage child confiding in her about her gender dysphoria, Allison was left with little option but to educate herself about gender identity issues and inform herself as to how best to provide the love and support her daughter needed to ensure that they could navigate the road ahead together and she is now using that personal experience to raise awareness and to help and support other families facing similar issues.

Having started as a "kitchen table" charity founded in 1995 by a small group of parents who had been unable to otherwise access the support they needed, Mermaids UK has grown into a UK network providing a range of online forums; telephone helpline services and face to face peer support resources for both young people and adults coming to terms with transgender issues in their personal or working lives. The importance of letting trans-children be the people they want to be without fear of bullying cannot be underestimated by all those with a responsibility to support the wellbeing of those children. Parents, schools and health professionals therefore need to work together to provide the emotional, educational and medical support required. We learnt that while significant numbers of trans-children have actively self-harmed or considered suicide, mental health problems in trans-children are not inevitable and with the right support from their family, school and GPs, children who socially transition have rates of anxiety and depression no higher than their peers.

Having navigated that road successfully with a confident and happy daughter who gender transitioned while at school and is now thriving as a young adult in further education, Allison is an inspiration for all parents. No one can truly understand the journey that trans-children and their parents have been through except those who themselves have walked in those shoes and at the end of the evening I was left with one thought: who was more proud, Allison of her daughter or her daughter of her mother?



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