



## **PFLAG Queensland – The History**

By Shelley Argent

This is the history of PFLAG in Queensland from 1990-2012 and 2014-2017 and National Spokesperson from 2007 – to present day. This has been written from my perspective. Unfortunately, there are a few gaps as readers will see, but I thought it preferable to including information that may have been inaccurate.

In 2013, Donna Goddard was President for a short time and resigned due to work commitments.

Pasi Linnosto was President in 2018 and 2019 and resigned due to work commitments taking him interstate.



2020 Jane Hopkins is now the present day President with some of the committee.



### **Prior to 1999**

Coral-lea Benzie to my knowledge initiated PFLAG in the early 1990s, not long after Premier Wayne Goss legalised homosexuality in Queensland. Her primary support was from her husband. Coral-lea was working full-time when she decided to run PFLAG from home and self-fund.

Her decision to start a PFLAG group in Brisbane came from a discussion with her gay son Tim. Coral-lea lamented that when he came out; there was no-one else to talk to that she knew in a similar position. She didn't want to talk to a psychologist – she just believed she would have benefitted from talking with another Mum. Tim encouraged her to start the PFLAG group and so she did.

This was at a time when few people had computers and the internet was in its infancy. Coral-lea believed the most effective way to support parents was informally. Additionally, there are/were no official guidelines for anyone, so Coral-lea organised PFLAG based on her personal instincts.

Coral-lea had resources posted to her from the USA, because there were very few in this Australia.



Coral-lea advertised in two newspapers, one was called Brother/Sister and the other Queensland Pride. Both were gay community newspapers in circulation at the time. The advertisements were simple and included her name and home phone number.

Tim was living at home for the first few years of PFLAG and remembers regular calls to the house from distressed parents. "Mum would disappear to the bedroom to talk down some upset mother or father. She was always very clear from the beginning that she was not a counselor or a professional – that she was just a Mum and was there to listen.

Sometimes calls would last for several hours." Coral-lea's husband Jim would sometimes take calls if they wanted to hear from a Dad, and the couple often visited parents in person (sometimes accompanied by Tim, if they wanted to meet him too). They once drove to Nambour to meet some parents because at the time there was no local support of any kind.

"I still meet people to this day who remember Mum, even one who came up to me in a nightclub in London!" Tim said. "We all thought it was a bit crazy at the time for Mum to have her home phone number in the paper, but there was never any trouble or problems." It should be noted that this would have been thirty years later, which shows the positive mark PFLAG and parents such as Coral-lea can leave on families when they are in distress.

Initially, meetings were held, but Coral-lea abandoned these due to a lack of demand – to her PFLAG was less about events and meetings and more about frontline support.

PFLAG parents marched in Pride Rallies from City Hall to Musgrave Park (which was the original route). At the park they had a stall providing information and were always seen as a support for the community.

Coral-lea and Tim once appeared on SBS as part of a panel show about sexuality and Coral-lea wrote about her experience in the compendium "My Child is Gay" by Bryce McDougall. Eventually the phone number was listed in other states, with referrals coming in from New South Wales and Victoria

Tim has always been so proud of his parents for starting PFLAG in Queensland, support without fanfare or any expectation of recognition.

Mum felt really guilty when she felt she couldn't do the work anymore. She was just exhausted and was happy when Shelley came along when she did, to keep things going and start the next phase. But Mum and Dad made a real difference in people's lives," Tim said.

As an observation of this time, it would have been challenging for Coral-lea, her husband, and other parents involved. It was a different time, different era, and different thinking of society generally. But they paved the way for the next generation of PFLAG parents in Queensland.

I believe, being the leader of the first PFLAG group in a very conservative State like Queensland would have been quite challenging at times. Parents initially would have been more anxious and looking for answers. Some would have been secretive and fearful of being judged. Others, fearful for their children.

Furthermore, there would have been fewer people for Coral-lea to turn to for answers, because there were less community organisations, around HIV/AIDS would have been at its peak, parents would have been concerned about that and generally there was more physical danger for our children which would have been a concern. And, society generally was much less supportive.

## **History of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) Brisbane**

Much of this information has been taken from the newsletters including my own recollection of events.

### **Goals**

Providing Support to Parents  
Advocating for the rights of our Children  
Providing Community Education

Written by Shelley Argent OAM  
National Spokesperson PFLAG+

**1999**

## **MY INTRODUCTION TO THE LGBTIQ COMMUNITY**

I became the Convener for PFLAG on the 1st April 1999. Prior to this I was an education volunteer for twelve months. I soon began to get bored and decided it was time to begin a support group for parents. The logic was, the more people I could encourage to support their child, meant more people supported my child.

When considering how to start a support group, I spoke with someone from QUAC and he suggested I ring Coralea Benzie from PFLAG. I was told she would know what I needed to do. I made the call and by the time I hung up the telephone, I was the new Convener of PFLAG.

I had no guidelines, rules or high expectations initially. But I decided it was important to keep PFLAG involved with a legitimate LGBTIQ community organization.

- (a) it would give the group credibility
- (b) everyone there knew more than I did, so that would be an immediate and important reason to stay there
- (c) plus, it would give me more confidence

Within a few weeks I realised I could make this group into whatever I wanted and take it as far as I wanted. I set myself goals for what I considered to be quite high at the time.

- (a) become a public face
- (b) publicise the group
- (c) meet politicians State and Federal because they were the ones who could change laws

I did every course QUAC organised. HIV Support, Emotional Support, Sexual Health, Beat Outreach, Sexual Health Help Line.

I became involved with educational campaigns and when invited by workers to go to work shops or community group meetings, I always went and put brochure holders onto the doors of the venues and night clubs' toilets.

All of this gave me a great insight into the community. The more I did, the more I saw what still needed to be done.

## GENERAL INFORMATION AND OBSERVATIONS

### Volunteers taking leadership roles

From 1999, until the mid-2000's was a time when many parents were hesitant to take public roles. There were many reasons, but I feel the main reason was the hesitancy to "out" themselves and/or their children and second the fear of being judged.

However, I believed if we wanted to make change we needed to be seen and be active. In one sense I didn't care about the hesitancy of some as I knew when I needed volunteers to fold, parcel and pack resources, people always volunteered. Furthermore, as parents became more comfortable and confident, they began to stand at stalls, speak at Inquiries with me, march in rallies and travel with me to various workshops.

I always knew when I needed assistance who to approach because everyone in the group had different strengths.



## **Presentations**

Over the years I was asked to give presentations at Universities in Brisbane, supportive Churches, social groups like Probus which was mainly retired professionals, the Welcome Wagon which was about welcoming new people to the city or local area, book clubs, Rotary group's talks at local libraries.

Additionally, I was asked to speak at a few construction companies which have always been considered hot beds of homophobia and I was excited and surprised when asked. I made a habit of always getting to the venues early and chatting with those who attended. To me, this way made the event more friendly and with some idle chit chat, which made the topic so much easier.

## **Schools**

I have been asked to speak at several schools primary, secondary and private. At times it has just been about general education for high school students and encouragement to be supportive of diverse students. At other times, it was talk to teachers and staff about students who identified as trans. Some children were very young, but the teachers needed to feel comfortable with way of reacting to the children's variety of needs. I travelled to Hervey Bay, a couple of times Townsville, Toowoomba, schools near the NSW border and schools in the metropolitan area. Occasionally, the schools were private.

## **Travel**

In my era as leader there were some years where I felt as if I lived out of a suitcase. During the week there would be presentations, or some travel involved, perhaps to Canberra which was regular. Then on weekends I travelled with others to do Marriage Equality Workshops. I remember on one weekend I flew on Friday to Adelaide for a workshop Saturday and that night flew to Perth for another workshop on the Sunday. Monday, I flew home to get ready for another hectic week and weekend. This was very common.

I made a point of getting to know the PFLAG groups around the country. If I was visiting another State and had time, I would make appointments with MP's and Senators I never had a chance to meet in Canberra.

## **How times changed**

When PFLAG began, parents were suspicious of me, angry and at times abusive because I was supportive of their children. However, over the year's attitudes have changed.

Parents now call asking where they can take their children to find friends who are also LGBTIQ, not blaming their friends as they used to do.

Children are coming out to parents at a much younger age and that's ok. I am not hearing "they are too young to know".

Children are transitioning at a much younger age and that's ok. Parents are very confused, but the child's wellbeing is their main concern. Interestingly, the Children's Gender Clinic at the Mater Hospital has an extremely long waiting list.

There is no longer the shame, blame and guilt by parents as there was when I first began.

In Queensland when my son came out in 1995, LGBTIQ people had no rights at all, except the right to be gay or lesbian. Now, they and TIQ people have equal rights.

Businesses have inclusion policies for LGBTIQ people.

Trans people over the age of 18 years old can be given time from work for reassignment surgery.

Children can access puberty blockers without needing to access the courts for permission. Now, it's between the doctor, parents and the child.

Gender diverse children have the right to go to school as their perceived gender.

The State government has introduced anti bullying policies into State schools and so much more.

## **RE-INVIGORATING PFLAG**

The first year as Convener of PFLAG consisted of taking phone calls and mailing details (not everyone had emails) with the hope of having a group meeting when we had enough interested parents. I also did as much research as possible to develop resources because there was very little positive information to be found that was helpful to parents.

At the time, I found talking to young people and asking questions about reactions by family when they disclosed to family extremely helpful. Additionally, it was important to understand what the person's greatest fears about disclosing were regardless of their age.

I also spoke to different groups to understand their goals and the way they operated, I would then take what I considered helpful ideas and develop a support group for parents best suited for Queensland.

I came to the conclusion, the best way to put parents at ease at meetings was to be friendly and informal. I encouraged people to bring some afternoon tea to share and have a coffee or tea as the meeting progressed.

We did stop for an official afternoon tea, but realistically it was intended to let parents chat between themselves and gain support from each other.

Sitting around a table gave people a psychological sense of protection. Sitting in an open circle can make people feel exposed and uncomfortable. It seemed to me, people would feel less exposed sitting around the table, even if it's crowded.

Furthermore, our guest speaker always spoke at the first half of the meeting. When we stopped for afternoon tea it:

- (i) gave the guest speaker the opportunity to leave if they wanted;
- (ii) people to speak one on one to the guest speaker if they chose;

## **2000**

### **FIRST OFFICIAL MEETING**

PFLAG's first meeting was held on 19th Feb 2000. Ten parents attended at Allen St South Brisbane. It was an old house given to Qld Positive People (QPP) by the Nuns at the Mater Hospital, who had been so supportive of those who developed HIV/AIDS in the 1980's. Unfortunately, I was given an old set of keys, and so we were locked out. They forgot to tell me the locks had been changed. Instead we sat under a massive tree with no afternoon tea or toilet facilities.

Initially, we had no real plan about direction, for a few months parents just wanted to talk freely and without judgment. Because I had never done anything like this before, I was learning as I went along. Eventually, it was decided to have guest speakers who could provide added education about issues affecting their children.

During 2000 we were given a telephone number at Qld AIDS Council 30171739. My email address was [\*\*pflagbris@hotmail.com\*\*](mailto:pflagbris@hotmail.com). At this time, I did a lot of research, downloading and photocopying which was given to parents.

### **BARBECUES FOR DADS**

I began having regular barbecues at my home to encourage conversation between the fathers. I did this because 99% of parents who attended regular meetings were mothers expressing concern about the husband's negative reaction. I made it compulsory that mums couldn't come alone.

Fifteen fathers came to the first barbecue. I had barbecues for several years until the need was no longer necessary.

Over the years they became extremely large and I could never be sure how many would attend. At times we had nearly sixty parents and some would bring their LGBTIQ child. It was not unusual for Don and me to not eat, but these events were really successful and achieved what they were meant to do, help dads support and understand their LGBTIQ children.

We began the conversation of discrimination and **bullying in school** and **discrimination of same-sex couples** with State Government. At the time, couples regardless of how long they had been together had no right to claim anything financial or material if their partner died, regardless of how long they had been a couple. Families could and often did step in and take everything, including making the grieving partner homeless and not permitted to attend the funeral.

PFLAG tried to set up a network **for parents of trans and intersex children**, but technology skills were limited and parents reluctant to talk on the phone, due to lack of trust.

PFLAG **produced its first resource** which was a brochure explaining who we are, what we do and how we can be supportive. The first print was 1000 which took 18 months to distribute. Next time 5000 were printed and took only 8 months to distribute.

## **PFLAG'S FIRST OFFICIAL OUTING**

The first Pride Fair Day, PFLAG led by me was 1999. It consisted of a hastily made \$50 banner being carried by James (my son) and his dog on one side and me on the other. The flag poles were then hammered into the ground at Musgrave Park near the Qld AIDS Council tent, where I stayed and collected when it was time for me to leave.

## 2001

2001 many parents flew to Sydney to attend and march in **our first Mardi Gras**. To us it was all very exciting. PFLAG parents I believe are technically the most boring group. It has always been a white T shirt and black pants with a PFLAG hat as a must.

However, the parents always received the loudest cheer. As we march along, we always get kisses and hugs from onlookers.



At the beginning of 2001 it was decided to have **bimonthly meetings** which has worked well for many years. The parents who needed support between meetings were met individually at coffee shops with poor service. The intention was we wouldn't be bothered and nobody cared how long we sat there and talked.

My theory was, never to leave a parent unless they were laughing. I knew when I could show them the funny side of having an LGBTIQ child they would be fine. I would then phone them a couple of days later as a follow up.

We did try to let the P&C's and Principals of the schools know we were concerned about our children and bullying in schools, but it was just not the right time. We believed if we partnered with Open Doors it may work: But due to management changes it was unsuccessful.

Organisers of **Sexpo** approached PFLAG about having a stall in the educational section. We did have a stall; however, we ended our participation after about five years when pornography became the norm. The benefit of this show was 1000's attended and so many got to know about PFLAG and what we did.

As parents became more comfortable and prouder, they began to get angry about **homophobic conversations and jokes** in their presence. It was decided a good response was "We have friends and loved ones who are gay and we don't like what you are saying". This one simple sentence usually brought an apology.

We began **providing resources** to students at University of Qld about "coming out" to family.

Additionally, we presented **workshops to students at UQ** about coming out to friends and loved ones. We provided tips on what to do and what not to do. In addition, we had two parents come along and tell their story, to give students an idea of what to expect and to learn how parents came to understand what was happening.

**Country families began to seek support** when their loved ones came out. It was extremely difficult and isolating for rural families. Many felt they were the only ones in the township that had a LGBTIQ one.

***It was mentioned that Shelley had provided support and encouragement for many years - little did we know what was to come.***

## **2002**

PFLAG became part of the **QPS LGBTI liaison committee**. At this time, it was pretty disorganised, lack of will and lack of funds because it was still in its early days in Qld. But we believed it was important to be connected because of the need for us as parents to have input.

The debate surrounding the **Age of Consent** was taking hold. The campaign was led by John Frame from 4ZZZ. I wrote many letters to State MPs about this issue and was videoed several times by John who was keen to discuss the need for change. The videos were then sent to MPs in Queensland because it was a State issue. Equality in Age of Consent was very important because it stopped many underage young men from seeking sexual health checks. Part of the problem was, if the partner was 18 years of age, he could be jailed. There is/was no age of consent for lesbians. The Age of Consent legislation was eventually passed in 2016

We began to advertise in the EGN of Saturday's Courier Mail every month thanks to private funding. Later, advertising increased to every second Saturday which was a big success.

We began receiving requests for resources and mailing costs were covered by Qld AIDS Council.

PFLAG became involved with achieving **De facto rights** which were passed by Premier Peter Beattie in 2002. This legislation at least proved people were a couple, plus some rights were achieved, but not enough. I began to do more lobbying - meeting with state MP's and State Leaders. At that time, it was futile to have great expectations, but we couldn't give up.

PFLAG finally had an **official logo** which was designed by Madeleine Majajas. Her parents Vicki and Agu were both PFLAG parents. Furthermore, bisexuality was being discussed in the group. We did have a few parents with children who identified as bisexual.

### 2003

PFLAG finally had a **strong presence at Pride Fair Day**. Hundreds of people came seeking resources for parents. Others came to say thank you for helping their parents and some just came to talk with friendly parents.



This was the first year when we decided to do regular **mail outs of resources and posters**. We chose **Brisbane libraries** first, because this would be where people would go looking for information.

I managed to get PFLAG included in the white page, community section, at the front of the Telephone Book. This was the first-place people went when seeking support, regardless of their need. Additionally, the exposure gave us more credibility, with the people seeking support.

The **Great Bake Off at the Sportsman's Hotel**, every August, became a financial life saver for PFLAG. We were one of the recipients for many years.

**The topic of adoption was being discussed** but many were of the belief children needed a mother and father. Plus, parents being single was again a big issue.

## 2004

**A CD of parent's stories** was produced by John Frame of 4ZZZ for parents unable to attend meetings. The taping of stories was done in Shelley's lounge room, with snacks and coffee for those still waiting to tell their story.

A **borrowing library for parents** was produced with all books relating to parents and their needs and queries.

We **challenged homophobic humour on TV**. The Footy Show and Bert Newton Morning Show were the worst for blatant poor taste humour. I regularly complained to the Broadcasting board about exactly what was said and the exact time on the program it was said. To make it easier I taped the programs and then had copies of the programs.

I wrote letters regularly to Federal MP's about the rushed legislation and **amendments to Marriage Act**. I also sent letters to Archbishop Battersby from Brisbane and Archbishop Pell from Sydney about the homophobic attitude in churches. Not surprisingly, I received no response and nothing changed with the churches.

I began paying QUAC for photo copying and mail outs.

This is also the time we began mailing **resources to Brisbane medical centres** to make them aware of PFLAG and our resources.

The AIDS Council changed premises from Peel Street, South Brisbane to Melbourne Street, West End. The only problem for PFLAG was there was no extra space for us, so I sat in the photocopying room for a few years. I really didn't mind at all, to me it was more friendly with more interaction between the workers.

The meeting room was quite good and easy car parking. The first time I unlocked the building for a meeting on a weekend, they forgot to tell me the new code. Alarms screamed and several indigenous men who had been sitting quietly in the shade of the car park scattered like you wouldn't believe. Over time, we became very friendly and they were always trying to marry me off to one of the men.

**2005**

It was around this time that **rural families** became a huge concern to me. Parents Ron and Diane Nunan and I drove to Charleville in April stopping along the way for radio interviews. We planned a series of interviews with a person from the Charleville radio station. But I do believe the radio station didn't really expect us to arrive, because the radio compere was stressed by our presence.

The attitude of the radio station employee added to my concerns about rural and regional families. There was no support, fear of lack of confidentiality and the suicide rate was high for LGBTIQ youth. I began to develop regional contacts and write resources that would be relevant.

Susan Booth the **ADCQ Commissioner initiated a committee** of people from the LGBTIQ community. The committee consisted of police, trans people, intersex and community workers etc. which was fantastic and gave us hope that we could achieve.

Homophobia was always an issue and being part of the committee, they encouraged me to initiate a **writing campaign to high schools** and State MP's regarding homophobia and transphobia in schools. As our credibility was rising, the **Wickham Hotel's Big Gay Day** which was held the weekend after Mardi Gras, asked us to be a recipient of their fund raising, plus volunteer to help the day run smoothly which we did for many years.

We did a **3<sup>rd</sup> reprint of Sexuality is not a Choice** (3000). It was extremely popular and filled with additional information for each reprint.

**Because I Love You I want you to Know**, was a booklet printed to support young people about coming out. It provided lots of tips about how to tell and when to tell. Additionally, the booklet explains if things don't go well, always have a backup plan.

2000 **general brochures** explaining what PFLAG did and contact details were printed. Plus, PFLAG was included in the MIMs which is a directory for doctors.

We began to receive interest from several radio programs state and national on LGBTIQ issues of the day. I used to **provide training to Gay and Lesbian Welfare Assoc. (GLWA) trainees** who were telephone counselors to anonymous callers.

Adverts kept appearing in Saturday Courier Mail to promote our service, but now they were weekly.

This was the year **PFLAG became incorporated**. We had never worried before, but it became easier for us when applying for funds to be independent and not needing to rely on QUAC as our sponsors.

I took the **Catholic Leader to ADCQ** over a derogatory article stating lesbians and gays came from families living in low socio-economic conditions. Parents were considered to have poor parenting skills that traumatised and abused their children. Interestingly, the editor of the paper arrived with a lawyer, the author of the article had legal support and I had a Catholic Dad. I knew we had won when the lawyer became restless and shaking her head. I didn't want money or an apology, I wanted equal space in their paper and was given equal space in their paper to promote PFLAG and counter their article.

I was asked twice to do **workshops at Turtle Cove** which is an LGBTIQ only resort in North Qld. one of the PFLAG Mums from Brisbane came with me. We always did a workshop for LGBTIQ people and another for parents. These events always brought positive media attention which was good for people in the north of Queensland.

**The pflagbrisbane.org.au website became prominent internationally receiving over 10,000 hits and downloads of Sexuality is not a Choice, per month.** Furthermore, our mailing list increases from 10 to 300

## **2006**

The AIDS Council bought a building in Helen St, Newstead to give them a permanent home. Again, we had our own office and plenty of storage for resources.

PFLAG began an **official helpline** 0400 767 832. This gave people the opportunity to call anytime for support or information

Our information pack "**Longreach for Outreach**" was launched on 29<sup>th</sup> November. The packs were written for rural and regional teachers, police, health practitioners and community workers with referrals and information for them and information for them to give to parents and youth.

Several working bees were done by parents to ensure the project succeeded. 45,000 resources were packed into 5,000 packs and delivered to Qld Police Service; School based health nurses across Queensland, medical centers in rural and regional areas, plus every PFLAG group in Australia.

The total cost was \$32,000 and we were fortunate to receive the funds from the Gambling Community Benefit Fund. The packs were very well received and very popular, especially with schools.

David graham a contestant on Big Brother donated \$20,000 to PFLAG when he won Australia's Brainiest Housemate. David did this because we were supportive of his family when he first came out which to me was an amazing gesture. I didn't realise at the time, but it was David's mother who

came to see me and when she left, I felt as if I had failed her which was why I created the pack. It took nearly 12 months of writing additional resources. There was so much involved to make this pack a success.

I was very lucky, QUAC gave me a car park to store the many boxes of resources that needed to be sorted, packed, repacked and then sent out. I had an assembly line of packers and resources. Once completed and in the folders, they were repacked into boxes and then taken by Australia Post trucks for mailing.

**Australia Marriage Equality (AME)** was a new group that had formed to combat Mr. Howard and his changing the marriage act to eliminate same sex couples from marrying. The first meeting of AME was held in my kitchen. I worked with AME for a few years and was the main financier of the group. But after a difference of opinion, both groups went their own way.

***I was happy to work with different groups on projects and campaigns but was always clear that PFLAG was independent and equal. Additionally, we were not compelled at any time to give up our independence and could walk away at any time.***

PFLAG took part in the first **National day of Action on August 13**. This involved three cars with rainbow flags, stickers and honking horns.

I had already been travelling to Canberra for quite a while, but my travel really began in earnest. I was always lobbying with other campaigners. While in Canberra we spent many of our days running between meetings. We knew it was too early for marriage equality to pass, we could tell by the Galaxy Polls we were doing. There were Senate Inquiries, debates, various campaigns and as mentioned previously a lot of time spent in Canberra talking with politicians from both sides.

## **2007**

PFLAG Brisbane hosted the **3rd National PFLAG Conference**. It was held at the Brisbane Convention Centre at South Bank and the hotel accommodation was at Rydges. 80 people attended, with two full days of speakers. It was just a few of us who did the initial work, but many volunteered for the two days with a variety of tasks. Overall, we were very pleased with the outcome and would change very little.

Once again PFLAG **concentrated on regional families** with advertising in regional areas and country papers.

Traveled to Cairns pride fair to show support, plus had a few presentations to different LGBTIQ and have meetings with QUAC people.

I did more **lobbying of the State Government for adoption and surrogacy**. This time I sent a photo of a child with two mothers to every MP and completely personalised the campaign towards this child. I was told later that it made a huge difference because many couldn't get the face of this child out of their minds.

Additionally, this was a year where we spent time in Canberra at every parliamentary sitting. Coalition MPs and Senators were definitely against providing our adult children with any rights. There were Inquiries and general negativity about economic equality.

I believe Kevin Rudd was elected on his promise to legislate for **economic equality**. It was not the same as marriage, but it was a great step forward.

I was asked to be a **Living book at the Brisbane library** in the City. I never said no to such invitations because I have always believed events such as these promote PFLAG and what we do...

## **2008**

I was invited to be part of **Kevin Rudd's 2020 Summit** in Canberra. Unfortunately, I felt the whole process was taken over by groups with agendas. There was no mention of homelessness, migrants, racism or anything LGBTIQ. Worse still it was very difficult to encourage conversation or inclusion in the topics chosen.

From this, I was asked to organise a **"Summit" on a series of issues regarding the LGBTIQ**, Pride event. The event was held at the Kelvin Grove Campus. I had facilitators for each topic who were asked to write a report about people's opinions and solutions. The report was well received, but nothing came from it.

I wrote and published **5000 packs Addressing Homophobia in the Workplace**. Every pack was distributed by Qld Council of Unions in Queensland

**Indigenous pack was developed with 2 Spirits**, the indigenous arm of Qld AIDS Council and PFLAG.

With funds from "Great Bake Off" a summary of **"Sexuality is not a Choice" was translated into 17 languages**. The Institute of Modern Languages did the translations at a cost of \$9000.

Private funding from PFLAG sponsored **QUT study by Angie Dwyer about LGBTIQ youth and policing**

We made another attempt for group meetings for parents with Trans and intersex children

## **Brochure produced for parents who didn't know questions to ask loved ones about sexual diversity**

### **Booklet for supporting married people when they disclose to family**

PFLAG provided training to lifeline counselors regarding LGBTIQ people and their issues, plus parental fears.

25th November- finally the legislation for removal of economic discrimination was passed.

## **2009**

We published a **resource titled "How to Become an Equal Rights Ally"** we had been getting requests from people asking what they could do. Additionally, this was information that could be applied to any cause and to heterosexuals who showed interest in what we were doing.

After a long campaign **parental recognition and surrogacy legislation** was passed. This campaign was not difficult but long and tedious. Anna Bligh was Premier at the time.

Every week I wrote a letter to every State MP reminding them of the uncertainty, the insecurities and fears these families endured while the politicians would never experience as heterosexual couples.

I included photos of parents and their children/babies on the bottom of each letter to let politicians know these were real people being affected by their inaction.

Additionally, I did campaigns on the radio and quarter page adverts in the Courier Mail on both Anna Bligh and Lawrence Springborg about this issue. Plus, I used to visit many MP's in Parliament House. I remember the letter I wrote to State politicians about parental recognition and surrogacy just after Christmas.

I asked if they had a lovely Christmas filled with joy and gift giving etc with their children and loved ones. I then went on to explain how many parents and children from same sex families didn't experience the same joy because they felt insecure and invisible because of their (the MP's) inaction. I also received a phone call from a supposed friendly politician asking me to stop the campaign during the election. I lamented that I was really sorry, but it was all in motion and I couldn't stop what I had started. Three months after the election we had parental recognition and surrogacy

I travelled around Tasmania doing workshops at this time about marriage equality and how to approach MP's.

Meanwhile, I continued travelling to Canberra for every parliamentary sitting talking to politicians and giving them resources to read and talking to the media at every opportunity the rights of our LGBTIQ loved ones.

## **2010**

Increased community education began.

We had a student seek placement with PFLAG. He produced a brochure on homophobia in schools which we distributed throughout Queensland. We mailed about a dozen brochures to each State high school with a covering letter asking the brochures be left in the teacher's lunchroom for them to browse.

We were included in the first LGBTIQ exhibition at Brisbane city hall.

An **Australian story was done on me called "Mum's the Word"** this lifted the profile of PFLAG to a new level. The story was a finalist for a National Human Rights Medal.

Marketing material was developed to promote all of the PFLAG groups across Australia, their rights and general community education. We printed about **100,000 post cards** with various messages. They were distributed throughout the country in movie theatres, coffee shops and all businesses who accepted the cards.

We were scammed by false advertising which cost us \$3,000. The scam was about advertisements promoting PFLAG+ in Union and RSL magazines.

There was a lot of publicity surrounding **marriage equality**. Media releases were regularly sent to all forms of media outlets, letters were regularly sent to politicians and there were many interviews on radio and television. We also put large advertisements into the Australian and had regular radio and television campaigns. The campaigns were always directed at the PM of the day.

PFLAG+ and 2Spirits did an **indigenous PFLAG+ pack**. We had a brochure for those who were illiterate, one for those who were barely literate and one resource for anyone who was 100% literate.

## 2011

PFLAG+ organised what is called **a Fringe Event at Labor National Conference** in Sydney. The intention of these is to encourage politicians to come along and informally discuss the issue of the day with them.

The day after this event, we were permitted to sit at the back of the audience and listen to the discussion about marriage equality. The outcome was a conscience vote would be permitted in parliament when the marriage equality vote came.

This was done because Julia Gillard was against marriage equality and it gave her a way out, but marriage equality was voted in. She was being pressured by the Shop Assistants Union Leader to stand against equality. After the vote, we were ushered outside to a crowd of 10,000 people where we stood and passed on our message to what had just happened earlier.

Again, there was a lot of travel doing marriage equality workshops and general community education on the topic.

PFLAG+ became involved with Open Doors by supporting young people, some parents made meals for the food bank and hygiene packs and necessities were provided by PFLAG+ again by private donation.

Women's Weekly did a large story on PFLAG+ parents including Ron and Diane Nunan from Brisbane who were included. It was a very popular and large story that brought very positive publicity.

Workshops for marriage equality were done nationally. They were always on the weekend which let me do some travel through the week on other issues.

I was invited to a fund-raising lunch by Graham Perrett the MP for Moreton in Brisbane. Tickets were \$200 each. I asked how many were going and how many tickets were left to sell. I was told 25 could attend the lunch and only one ticket had been sold. I said I would take the rest. The **Attorney General Robert McClelland had lunch with 24 assertive parents** and the President of the Law Council. Additionally, I had personal stories from as many parents as possible and presented him with them as he was leaving. Funnily, he just had no idea what to do or say to us as Julia Gillard was the Prime Minister at the time.

**2012**

I was asked **to lead the Mardi Gras** with my husband Don and son James. The theme was "Family" and PFLAG+ parents marched behind us. The night was a little drizzly, but it didn't dampen the spirit of PFLAGgers.

I was asked to be on a committee to abolish the Panic Defence. The **Panic Defence** was used as a loophole to escape imprisonment or have murder charges weakened to manslaughter.

I along with others regularly lobbied the government to outlaw this loophole. However, I believe I was the token LGBTIQ community person. I believe they thought I would be easy to manipulate and no LGBTIQ person was on the committee. In fact, there were several lawyers, Debbie Kilroy from Sisters Inside, President of Victims of Crime and the new Commissioner of ADCQ Kevin Bates, Legal Aid. The Chairperson was going to close the meeting within minutes of the meeting opening and leave the law as it was, but I objected.

The first meeting resolved nothing except a lot of discussion, but the second did when people stood with me and then it was decided to repeal the act. However, nothing changed because an election was called and Labor lost. Anna Bligh was the Premier at the time and then Campbell Newman became Premier. The Anastacia Palaszczuk, Government finally outlawed the loophole.

***This came to a head when two men from Maryborough murdered a man they met. First, they took him home for dinner and later started to drive him back into the town. However, the man who sat in the back of the car with the victim, claimed the victim put his hand on his knee, which frightened the man. In fear he killed the man. A priest, who found the body in his church grounds was angry and lobbied the government for a long time.***

**Brochure for Parents of Trans** was developed and launched in Cairns at a Trans Conference

A **TV campaign** was done and shown on mainstream TV at peak time targeting Abbott on marriage equality. The advert showed parents and grandparents asking him to allow their child to marry.

I became a founding committee member of **LGBTI legal service**. The service provides referrals and a free service to the LGBTI community. A private donation paid the first two years running costs to ensure this service had time to establish itself.

**Brochure on suicide** was written by Paul Martin which was then printed and became a useful resource for PFLAG+

As Nat. Spokesperson for PFLAG+ I was invited to speak at an **Inquiry into Civil Partnerships** in Queensland. The Anastacia Palaszczuk Introduced this legislation into Queensland, which was not marriage equality, but the best a State Government could do.

**2014**

I wrote and published a booklet called "**Marriage Equality from a Parents Perspective**" 1000 were printed and again freely handed out to politicians and marriage equality workshops.

**DVD of parent's stories** was done as a follow on from the CD initially produced.

I began receiving requests to speak at schools to teachers about Tran's children and their needs



PFLAG+ organised a **marriage equality forum** at the Uniting Church at New Farm. Attended by Christine Forster (Tony Abbott's sister) Tim Wilson HRC commissioner, Peter Catt Anglican Dean of Brisbane, Graham Perrett and Teresa Gambaro federal Liberal and Labor MP's and a friend who represented everyday Australians.

This was intended to show from all sides why a Plebiscite was wrong and how a Free Vote would have been better financially for the country and respectful for LGBTIQ people and their families.

We received a grant from Gambling Community Benefit Fund to update resources which took several months to achieve.

The LGBTI Commonsense booklet was revamped generally and to be more inclusive of Trans people and their needs.

The Qld AIDS Council decided they wanted the room back we used as our office, even though we paid \$2000 per year and paid our own photocopying etc. However, they still permitted us to continue to have our meetings on the premises and store our resources on their premises

Marriage equality was a large part of grassroots workshops nationally meeting with MPs and Senators in Canberra at every parliamentary sitting and speaking at rallies

## 2015

In 2015 the State election was held. Annastacia Palaszczuk as the Labor Candidate for Premier and Campbell Newman was the sitting Premier. I wrote to Kate Jones my State candidate asking her what Labor would do for the LGBTIQ community.

I advised them that both their response would be made public because I felt it was important voters know their stance of equality. I also felt it would make them feel they had to stand by their response to my request.



The letter from Newman was almost insulting. I received a message from Kate Jones asking what I wanted. I outlined several pieces of legislation that needed to be changed. I received a letter from Labor assuring me that the changes would happen, and they did within Annastacia's first three years in power.

**Lobbied football codes for Homophobic free sports zone** in football at Suncorp – this was not successful because many football leaders felt it wasn't their responsibility.

Resources were updated. It was interesting to see how times had changed and needs of parents changed.

We then held a working bee to send new resources to Qld Police Service, State high schools and medical centres.

We held a roundtable with PFLAG groups from SE Qld. This was done to minimize isolation, see what other groups are doing and swap ideas.



One of my many campaigns was a letter writing campaign. The outcome was **I delivered 40kg of letters to every politician and senator in parliament** about the need for a free vote not a Plebiscite. I received a lot of media attention and killed a suitcase.



Sydney and then travelled by bus to Canberra. Apartments were pre booked, breakfasts organised, dinners organised and meetings with politicians set in place. Again, it brought good publicity for the campaign. For the benefit of politicians who didn't want to meet with us, I walked several parents through the halls of parliament speaking to MPs as we went.

Began working with True to deliver a **credible anti-bullying program for LGBTIQ students** called "Safe Schools"

I wrote and published **Marriage Matters a booklet about why we didn't need a plebiscite**. This was distributed to every politician and senator and given out at stalls and distributed when asked to speak to a variety of groups on the topic.



**Christmas cards were printed and sent to all federal politicians and 300 ministers** and priests nationally. The cards had a photo of a set of grandparents with their grandchildren of same sex parents.

**A Brag book was developed and printed** with photos of grandparents and their grandchildren with same sex parents. This booklet was done to combat the "what about the children" debate and show that children of same sex couples have extended family, just like any other child.



## 2016

Finally, two men volunteered to be on the committee. Pasi was the Treasurer and Jack was the Secretary.

A brochure was developed call **Tradies Tool Talk to halt homophobia on worksites**. We initiated this brochure because of the extreme abuse a young boy received as he passed a building site. Unions took the brochures and delivered them to the building sites.

We also developed an **excellent referral service** for parents which included schools, hairdressers and general information that minimizes trauma for trans young people while trying to access various services.

## 2017

PFLAG+ Just Equal fought very hard to halt the Plebiscite and were instrumental in getting Labor under the leadership of Bill Shorten to refuse to support the Plebiscite and the Greens headed by Richard de Natale.

The Coalition under the leadership of Malcolm Turnbull were determined to continue regardless. Included in the case was Andrew Wilkie, Independent MP for Tasmania. We **took the government to the high court** but were unsuccessful. Instead it was decided to have the Australian Bureau of Statistics have a voluntary survey.



From this came huge **Yes and No campaigns** and several campaigns. This was a very stressful and nonstop period for both sides. We were told if we lost, there was nowhere else to go. However, No Campaigners were told if they lost, legislation would be strongly considered to protect Christians and their beliefs.

During the week of the debate in Canberra, I sat in the Gallery, alone most of the time. I felt compelled to see this debate through to the end. The government made the debate as difficult as possible. One example was the government had 8 amendments that had to be voted on individually. If one had failed the whole process would have been wasted and marriage equality would have once again failed. Fortunately, no amendments were voted down.

Now we are working to halt the proposed Religious Discrimination Bill from being passed into law. The proposed Bill was initiated about two weeks after marriage equality was voted into legislation on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2017 The Religious Review was headed by Philip Ruddock.

When the review was completed and the report made public, it showed no need to proceed with the proposed legislation, because there was already religious freedom in this country. Several, high profile people of religion were of the same belief. However, the No campaigners and some other people of religion believe the wording in the legislation has not gone far enough.

PFLAG+ funded several campaigns against the government. I employed a PR company Cutting Edge to help (a) letter writing campaign (b) makeitlaw campaigns (c) give Malcolm a Backbone (d) give Malcolm a voice and so it went on.

## **LET'S GIVE MALCOLM A BACKBONE**

### **Stand up for marriage equality and give your MPs a free vote.**



As National Spokesperson I was invited to Sydney for the **Apology Day from Equal Voices** a Christian group led by Anglican Dean of Brisbane Rev Peter Catt of St. John's Cathedral. This group supported LGBTIQ people and their right to marry. The group opposes the present government led by Mr. Morrison PM and the right to discriminate on the grounds of religious belief.



The **Panic Defence** Legislation was finally abolished from criminal law.

PFLAG+ partners with True (aka Family Planning) developed programs and resources to support teachers in regional areas to provide information and support to families with LGBTIQ youth.

PFLAG+ Assisted with developing fact sheets for Lady Cilento gender clinic.

A father, Jack who was the secretary developed a strategic plan for next 3 years for PFLAG+

PFLAG+ developed and printed a brochure aimed to create awareness for migrants who had sexually and gender diverse children.

Community Education is becoming more aware regardless of the business or industry, plus government departments feeling the need to be more aware of the need to be supportive to LGBTIQ clients and staff E.g. Caterpillar, Lend Lease, Birth Deaths and Marriages.

## **Conclusion**

As a non-funded organisation, which is a 100% voluntary peer support who has relied on private donations by parents, I believe we have accomplished great things in the thirty years we have been operating in Queensland. We have and still do support families, we still provide education to community groups and we will continue to advocate for the rights of our children. These are the three main goals of PFLAG+.

Finally, I would like to thank those who have gone before me for their contribution to making a difference, those who have worked with me and those who are continuing to keep PFLAG+ a credible and worthwhile group in the LGBTIQ community in Queensland and Australia generally.

Shelley Argent OAM