

Exercising the right to come out

“Jamie I just heard the most awful rumour about you”

This was a comment made to a young man who had just 'come out' to his friends and family.

His response to this family 'friend' was: "If the rumour is that I'm gay then it's true." The fact that this woman classed the news that Jamie was gay as 'the most awful rumour' says it all.

Jamie sighs: "She kind of wised up as she got older." From speaking to young people in the Northwest region about how their sexuality affects them and the reactions of the people around it became apparent that each individual's experiences have been unique. Some have experienced difficulties while others never had to deal with the stigma surrounding homophobia.

We talked to one young person, Richard Feeney who said: "At the start what was the most difficult about being a young person and gay is finding people like you and getting out there and being who you really are." In the same interview Richard acknowledged that he knows of people who have had a very hard time coming out: he said: " Gay people had to go through some awful stuff when there was really bad stigma in NI."

This suggests there is a difference between the past generations attitudes and people today. A few other young people who have come out in the last few years shared their experiences. Grainne Meehan (17) said she hadn't received any discrimination or abuse from her friends but knows there are still people out there who have. Grainne longs for the day when this stigma is eradicated and young people can be themselves without having to worry about how people would receive them.

We also spoke to Jamie (19) who explained that he came out to his family when he was 17. He said: "My family were fine but he I was reluctant to tell them because I thought my dad would be ashamed because he was in the army when he was my age. I also thought I was letting my mum down. "

However, Jamie's worrying was for nothing as now his dad even asks him how his love life is going. It seems that even older generations are becoming more open-minded.

Another young person, Ryan Mullan said: "I came out five years ago to my parents. My father didn't mind, he was quite happy for me to be myself. Some people still have a little problem accepting it."

It's only in 2003 that the human rights have been amended to include the protection of the right to be whichever sexuality you choose, it states; "Enjoyment of rights and freedoms should not be hindered in any way on the grounds of sexual orientation."

This addition to human rights, although only recent, is solid proof that not only the Northwest, but the world is moving forward and slowly but surely becoming more accepting of homosexuality and stamping out the stubborn stigma surrounding homophobia.

About this story

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