

## Homophobic crime decline

**The Northwest is much more gay-friendly than it used to be assure PSNI and former Mr Gay Ireland.**

Recent statistics show that there were 17 homophobic motivated incidents in the G district (which includes Derry) in 2008/09 compared to 28 the previous year. This is almost a 40 per cent decrease.

Of these incidents 14 were wounding/assaults and two were intimidation/harassment. Over 50 per cent of the total incidents in the district occurred in Foyle with 9 recorded there.

PSNI Chief Superintendent Richard Russell explained: "We are not totally there yet in Derry but there has been a distinct improvement."

James Smallman (22), Mr Gay Ireland, spoke to Headliners about what it has been like to be a gay young person in Derry for the last four years. "I came out four years ago, when I was 18. I just told a few close friends. I was quite nervous about coming out and was worried how people were going to take it and what their reactions would be. I came out to my parents about a year after that. I gained some more confidence and I got the support of my family and my peers. I was quite surprised about how understanding my parents were. Neither of them had any issues with it. They were more concerned about my safety and how it was going to affect my life and my future, but they were very supportive and everyone I know has been. I actually had a very nice coming out experience."

Sadly James could have been one of the past statistics for homophobic motivated crime. He shared: "I've been both physically and verbally abused because of my sexuality. Throughout some of secondary school it was pretty bad at times. Just more verbally than it was physical. I've been in trouble in the town twice. I've been physically beaten up by people just because of my sexuality.

"At the time, I felt awful. It does play on your self-esteem and it can have quite a bad effect on you but I actually came out of it a stronger person." James assured: "From those experiences I was quite happy about how it was actually dealt with, both by the police and the support network I have, friends and family. I think homophobia in Derry is decreasing actually. Just from what I've seen. People seem to be coming out a lot younger now than they used to be in years past. In the 90s or the 80s, you never would have heard of a 14 or 15 year old coming out to their friends, telling them that they were gay.

"I think people are more understanding now. You're still going to get people who are very narrow-minded, people who are homophobic towards people. However, the more visible the gay community are the more understanding and the more tolerant they'll be. I think young people are starting to realise that and are saying, "You know what? Sod the negative people, I am who I am and I'm going to show who I am."

Hearing that statistics actually show a decrease James said: "Police pay a lot of attention to hate crime. They have a specific legislation set up for it now, whereas they didn't in the past. Certainly, from my experience, when the attack was reported there was action taken right away. There is also a greater presence of police in the town centre on the weekends too. It does have an affect on the people that would normally try to attack gay people in the street."

PSNI Superintendant Richard Russell told Headliners reporters: "Prejudice in general, and that includes homophobia, is the scourge of society. People who act on their prejudices need to know there are consequences for that."

He added: "The fear of crime in the gay community is as important to the PSNI as the number of crimes reported. "It's our duty to react quickly, be professional, provide support and information and give out a clear message that criminals will be prosecuted."

**For more information contact: The Rainbow Project, 12A Queen Street, Derry, BT48 7EG. Tel: 028 7128 3030. [www.rainbow-project.org](http://www.rainbow-project.org)**

### About this story

This article was written by Eimear Roddy (16) and Fiona Hall (16).

### 0 comments

- [Add a comment to this page](#)

---

Built on [Cubik](#)

©2012 Headliners

Registered Charity Number 1043300. Supported by the [Department for Children, Schools and Families](#)