

## **Happy families**

### **I'm A Family Member – Get Me out of Here!**

Are traditional family values breaking down?  
Does every child need a mother and father?  
Do we need to be more creative in defining family?

These were some of the questions posed at NCBI's 2<sup>nd</sup> Diversity Dialogue – Re-defining Family hosted during Lancaster's Pride Week.

Fifty people heard Cat's Chorus' rendition of Chumbawumba's song Homophobia. Excerpts from a play written by Lizzie Hare called Beginning Solitude were performed and the audience were moved by experiences of family shared by panel members Lenny St Jean, Kameedea Brown, County Councillor Chris Coates, Luke Kershaw and Yehudit Keshet.

The event was designed to coincide with the legislation on Civil partnerships which gives same sex couples the same legal rights as married couples in areas like tax, social security, inheritance and workplace benefits.

Panel members shared models of family which were complex and multi layered, including step families, adopted families and families of choice, pointing out how families were sometimes constructed on the basis of economic need, loss of partners and a creativity born out of prejudice and discrimination.

County Councillor Chris Coates reminded us that historical family patterns are not what we expect them to be. He said,

'The family narrative I carry in my head of the traditional family, one mum, one dad and two children is inaccurate. If we look back at local history there were all sorts of family structures, from extended families to nuclear families to single parent families. The idea that family structures are breaking down and there is a traditional family structure is a historical anomaly.'

One person left the dialogue saying,

'I will call my family more often. Where would we be without family in one shape/ sort or another?'

One participant said,

'This has been a great evening. I really appreciated how gay people have had to fight against prejudice to create their own sense of family. It has made me think about my commitment to friends and family.'