

Aware of bigotry, youth join Mardi Gras

Danya Levy

JEWS understand what discrimination is and where it can lead, says Habonim Dror youth movement leader Brandon Srot.

With this in mind, the youth group passed a resolution supporting gay rights — and Mr Srot and a dozen other Habonim leaders marched with "Twice Blessed" — the Jewish float in this year's Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Parade on Saturday night.

It was the first time that a Jewish youth group had participated in the Mardi Gras, which began 24 years ago and has evolved into Australia's largest civil rights demonstration, featuring 7000 participants and 600,000 spectators.

Following its debut in 2000, the Jewish float comprised about 85 gays, lesbians, family members and supporters wearing black T-shirts with pink Stars of David and singing *Hava Nagila* and *Shalom Aleichem*.

"We realise there may be negative implications to what we are doing," Mr Srot told the *Australian Jewish News*, "but it's something we believe in. We want to create a warm environment for gays and their families."

The Habonim leaders approached Dayenu, asking if they could participate in the parade, *madricha* Alana Tassie said. "Habonim feels it's important to support Mardi Gras."

Taking a stand on discrimination is a principle of Judaism, said *madricha*



Habonim youth movement leaders at the Mardi Gras: Alana Tassie, Tamara Kezelman, Amanda Goldberg, Blanca Dubb, Lana Fester, Justine Turner, Shelley Cass, Ronit Sharon, Brandon Srot, Ailsa Holzman, Liron Deutsch.

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Tamara Kezelman. "It's the Jewish values of tolerance and acceptance."

Participating in her third Mardi Gras alongside daughter Justine Armstrong, author Diane Armstrong said "it's important for young people to have their parents' support".

The Jewish community needed to

see that people taking part in the Mardi Gras "are just like them", she said. "There's too much prejudice and too little understanding.

"These people are sons and daughters, just like other sons and daughters. And we are parents, like any other parents, who are proud of

our sons and daughters."

Participating for the first time, her husband, Dr Michael Armstrong, said while he had difficulty with overt demonstrations of sexuality, he had to support his daughter. "It's taken me a few years to come to this, but it's important that the commun-

ty accepts people, whoever and whatever they are."

Diane Libhaber joined the Jewish float after watching a friend's 34-year-old son die of AIDS last year. "It's the worst thing I've seen. It was the most painful and prolonged death; everybody suffered".

Former South African social worker Pam Sachar participated "out of love. It's important to spread love. What's life about? Sharing and acceptance. It's all very well to say the world is a horrible place, but each one of us can change it."

Kim Gotlieb wore a pink tulle skirt and veil, and a black T-shirt with pink Magen David. His "groom" — his heterosexual brother, David Gotlieb — wore a black suit, pink bowtie and kipa.

Reform rabbis had recently approached the Dayenu gay support group to discuss same-sex marriage, Kim Gotlieb said, and this was the inspiration behind the decision to dress as bride and groom.

Dayenu had always argued for equal rights, co-convenor Judy Kell said. "Just as heterosexual Jews have the opportunity to marry, gay Jews should have that opportunity."

Same-sex marriage is the next step in recognition, she said. "When two Jews get together, all they can get is a commitment ceremony, but it's not presided over by a rabbi. It's not an option." The Progressive movement had come far, she said. "I believe it will happen."

Photo: Ingrid Shakenovsky