

OUT

but not outside



Jewish gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender group Dayenu in 2008.

DAYENU
Sydney's Jewish GLBT Group

A decade after Dayenu first marched in the Sydney Mardi Gras, the organisation is hoping it won't be too long before it becomes part of the communal establishment.

Josh Levi reports.

TEN years after Dayenu was established to raise the visibility of the Jewish gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community within the larger Jewish community, the organisation held its first annual general meeting on Sunday.

The event was a major step towards officially becoming a part of the community by joining the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies (JBD), the roof body of Sydney's Jewish community.

The move comes after the JBD passed a motion earlier this

year to support acceptance, tolerance and equal rights for the gay community.

Roy Freeman, who was elected as the first president on Sunday, has been part of the organisation since it he moved to Sydney in 2001.

"It all started in 2000 when Dayenu marched in the Mardi Gras parade for the first time as one Jewish float and the organisation has continued to grow," Freeman said.

Stressing the significance of the JBD vote, he added, "It was a big, symbolic step. I was very proud of the Board of Deputies to vote that in so easily and it shows they are such an amazing organisation.

Freeman said the plan is to be affiliated with the JBD in the near future, but first Dayenu needed a board and membership rules.

"The ultimate goal is for the Jewish gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community to feel a part of the wider Jewish and not ostracised."

Freeman observed that there have been issues for a long time about the acceptance of homosexuality within some parts of the Jewish community, but it is improving. "I think there has been a shift in the community and a lot of mainstream Jews are

more accepting than they were years ago, but there is still a lot more work to be done because there are still parts of the community, and individuals within it, that are homophobic.

"A lot more people are coming out at a younger age now and, instead of being ashamed, people are out and proud, although there are still people having to live in the closet for a variety of reasons."

He said the organisation has given people the chance to realise that they are not alone.

"Dayenu allows young Jewish gay, lesbian and transgender people to meet each other because when you are coming to terms, the worst feeling is that you are the only one going through your issues, but that isn't the case.

"It's great for people to be able to meet other people like them and build friendships and relationships."

Dayenu now has more than 300 people, who it keeps in regular contact with, and Freeman hopes the number will continue to grow as they raise awareness and people feel more comfortable.

Brandon Srot, who is well known in the community through his work with Shalom College, has started a subdivision of Dayenu for younger people.

"Dayenu is a community within our Jewish community and you can use it to be social, cultural or religious. It offers everything and you take from it what you want to," Srot said.

Srot joined Dayenu two years ago and then started the young group with a friend in May this year.

"We have 40 people that we are in communication with regularly but I'm not sure what will become of it because it is still young.

"We decided to have the separate entity because 20-year-olds don't

want to interact around the Shabbat table with 50-year-old people, so it gives younger members of the gay community a space that is non-judgemental."

Srot said becoming a part of the JBD would be a huge step.

"In some segments of our community there has been a change in attitude towards the gay community and this will hopefully highlight that," Srot said.

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Roy Freeman
Dayenu president

"There are still major sections of the community where it is swept under the carpet and gay people are not totally accepted and there is a lot of shame towards homosexuality.

"Any step towards equality is a good thing and even the [JBD] motion earlier this year, which was only theoretical, acknowledged the fact that gay people are more accepted in the community."

WHEN a photo of Dayenu at the Mardi Gras was published on the front page of *The AJN* in 2000, then editor Vic Alhadeff and Shalom College CEO Hilton Immerman were requested to appear in front of the beth din.

Alhadeff because he put the image on the front page, and Immerman

because Shalom College hosted an event for Dayenu the night before the march.

Rabbi Moshe Gutnick said Orthodox rabbis felt the coverage of the Mardi Gras was unacceptable, but not because it promoted homosexuality. "It did not fit with the traditional Jewish values and our expectations of a Jewish family newspaper, because the Mardi Gras is a venue for promiscuity," he told *The AJN*.

"Women used to drive around the streets topless and it wouldn't matter if they were gay or not, we don't support that. The Mardi Gras is a lot more than just gay people seeking acceptance."

Rabbi Gutnick, who was the president of the NSW Rabbinical Council when Dayenu first marched in the Mardi Gras and is now a member of the beth din, said he believes the community today is more tolerant.

"What a person does is between themselves and God and that hasn't changed in the last 10 years, but maybe there are more people out there that are more accepting," Rabbi Gutnick said.

"A homosexual relationship is forbidden and I can't change the Torah."

But he added, "I would welcome someone gay into my home in exactly the same way as I did 10 years ago."

And do others feel the same? "I think there has been a shift in the general community but not specifically from the Orthodox rabbinate," said Rabbi Gutnick.

"Perhaps there is a greater understanding of the dilemmas facing a person who is gay due to education and also there is a greater notion of acceptance of people who are less observant.



Dayenu in 2000 ... this photo appeared on the front cover of *The AJN* that year.

For more information on Dayenu, go to www.dayenu.org.au or call Roy Freeman on 0438 136 776.