

Rainbow families in rural and regional areas



Rainbow families are living in small, rural communities and regional centres throughout Australia. For many families, the experience is extremely positive and they find that the people in their community are welcoming and supportive. Some have a local network of other rainbow families; some are the first or only rainbow family in their area.

A key factor in how they are regarded seems to be the extent to which they are involved in the community. Making an active contribution to the civic life of a small town or regional centre is highly valued and there are very positive outcomes for families who are able to do this.

Becoming involved in your local community can help demystify your family and create positive relationships for you and your children. Being out, open and honest about who you are and the

nature of your family can help you to integrate into a community. Rainbow families might explore any of these pathways into a community:

- kinder committees or school councils
- sporting or social clubs
- religious or political groups.

People in rural and regional communities may have less experience of rainbow families than people in inner urban areas and may not be as

well-informed. Many rainbow families recognise that this does not necessarily constitute prejudice or discrimination and are happy to take on an educative role and give people time to adjust.

You may be surprised to find welcoming and inclusive medical facilities, community services, kinder staff and teachers in regional communities.

Parents say ...

Experiences

There are no real negatives for us. We've got this old couple next door, so I think if anyone was going to have an issue, they would, but they're just ... I mean, they bring our washing in if it starts to rain. **Ell**

It's hard to work out the difference between people's perceptions of surrogacy, and the number of children we've had (three), and the fact that we're gay parents. There are two or three different things there and it's hard to separate reactions to that from the fact that people might just think gay men shouldn't have children. **Anthony**

My partner got a promotion at the school down here, to second in charge, and for next year he has been promoted to principal. We're in a Western District regional town and we've had no issues. We're known as 'Peter and Hamish with the kids' and no-one has ever blinked an eye – it's amazing. **Peter**

I'd say our experience of being gay dads raising three kids in the country has been mixed. Since we've had kids, we've been quite surprised that a lot of people have drifted off, and some people we never expected to get support from have popped up. It's not always clear why that it is and it could just be because things change when you have three very young kids. **Anthony**

We live in a very small town in the north east. There are 1500 people in the broader district and about 600 or so in town. I guess they are all Nationals voters. I wouldn't say that people have a particular view about us one way or the other, really. We are just part of the furniture. **Katrina**

We live in a large country town, which used to be very Anglo-Saxon, but it's slowly become more diverse. Our son is one year old, and I'm expecting triplets, and so far it's all been fine. People are generally quite positive and we've both worked at very supportive workplaces. **Michelle**

We live in a tiny community of about 2500 people, about 150 kilometres from Melbourne, and it's heaven on earth. When we set about trying to find a community that met our needs, one of the important things was that it was a small, rural community that was progressive and rainbow family-friendly. **Trudy**

We live in a semi-rural area which you might call a slightly upper class hills area. So far, the community has been absolutely fantastic. We've only heard one negative comment about Jemima not having a father, which we expected at some point. **Eli**

Community

Part of my strategy is that I've got really involved in Cubs. There's a very significant Christian component in this community, and one of the things I've done is to try to get in with those people, so they get to know us as a family. It seems to be working really well – we're not a *thing*, we're an *us*. And we're still new, and you're going to be new for about five or ten years in this community. **Trudy**

Most rural communities are very happy with new people coming in, but what they like – more than in metropolitan communities – is that people get involved. If you get out there and meet people and join in with local community activities, I think you'd generally integrate pretty well. **Jenny**

The measure of worth in the community is the capacity you have to contribute, to create, to keep that community functioning, and we're pretty big community involvers. **Katrina**

We live in a large, rural, regional city in Queensland. It's got a bit of a reputation for being a redneck town, but we haven't found that particularly. I think it depends where you go and how you conduct yourself. We find it quite welcoming and we haven't had any issues here. **Jenny**

People in our community are on a journey, too, and that was actually our strategy: to bring people with us on our journey. **Trudy**

The town operates on the basis of its networks and contributions. There is a lot of civic participation and that is what's valued. It works for the girls for us to be involved in things. **Claire**

We found our community very positive. We've got great neighbours and it's like, *Hello! This is who we are and we're pretty nice people, come and have a coffee with us*. So we make an effort, I guess. **Jenny**

Services and schools

We spoke to the school and were comfortable with the principal's reaction, though he is on a journey, obviously. He wasn't entirely comfortable, but there wasn't anything that raised alarm bells. In terms of the parents, we haven't encountered anything that's been problematic at all. **Claire**

I guess you can work out fairly quickly which facilities and businesses are friendly. If you go in and you don't have a good experience, you just don't go there again. I remember one of our first experiences at a beach café. There was a big group of men and I sensed the staff weren't sure about how they were going to react to us. The staff looked after us and made sure we felt safe. **Anthony**

It's not always easy to get in to doctors in the country. We met our GP through the hospital. He came from somewhere in Victoria – Melbourne, I think – so he was quite receptive to the whole idea of these new baby boys and he wanted to be their doctor. He's been pretty supportive and friendly, and every time we go he makes a demonstration of how glad he is to see the boys. **Anthony**

We had an issue with a young male teacher in his first year out who yelled a lot. I raised it with the principal and was told very clearly that the teacher didn't yell and that my children mustn't be used to men's voices! Hilarious. Extraordinary. **Claire**

I'm interested in making more rainbow connections, but I'm also tapping into the multiple birth community. Locally, the group is lovely, and they are super excited that we have come along and we're having triplets. Certainly, the treatment from the local or public hospital and the maternal health team was great. **Michelle**

There's a really impressive medical clinic. We had assumed we would just use the local one for coughs and colds and we'd keep going back to town for other things, but we haven't. They've got posters up, which the kids have seen, and it's all very inclusive: *Some boys like boys and some girls like girls and some boys like girls and boys.* It's gorgeous. **Claire**

Thoughts and suggestions

I think if you try to put yourself on a pedestal and be separate to the whole community, people don't like that. **Peter**

My advice to people moving to a regional area would be, just go and take people at face value. I think you need to not make it a secret. What people don't know, they make up. So, if you just go out and introduce yourselves, then if people want to have a little gossip and say, 'Ooh, they're gay', you go, 'Yeah', and then it's yesterday's news. **Jenny**

We took posters to Jemima's childcare about the different types of family you can have: single mothers or single fathers or two dads or two mums, and they put them up and asked for more. We're not the only rainbow family in the area, so that helps, too. **Ell**

People are people. You're going to find arseholes everywhere. There are arseholes in Melbourne and arseholes in regional centres and you just deal with it. **Jenny**

We don't avoid places. We'll go where we need to, but we are discreet. We're sensitive to perceptions in the community, but you can't not be out. **Anthony**

I think it's critical to be connected with other rainbow families. We can tell the kids as much as we want that we're normal, but if their outside reference points aren't telling them that, then that's a problem. They really feel extremely normal. They don't feel like they are odd. **Claire**

There is a group on Facebook, but it doesn't seem to get beyond that. I think it would be good for us to have more same-sex friends with kids. I wouldn't want the kids to think we are the only family with two mums. I'd say it's hard to meet other same-sex families. I know they are out there, but it's not that easy to make it happen. **Michelle**

We had more trouble as a couple in the city when we didn't have kids than we do now in a regional area. **Peter**

My experience is that being a mother softens the impact for people that you are queer. I reckon they are able to focus on you as a parent and that's a leveller for their anxieties. I think if you were a queer couple without kids in the country that might be a slightly different experience. **Claire**

I think this is quite confronting for people and it's going to take time for them to get their heads around it. **Anthony**

We don't hide. I think some people hide who they are and I think that makes it harder. **Ell**

I would tell any other gay couple thinking of moving to this area that it would be fine to come up this way. As long as they were open and didn't make an issue out of being gay or being a gay family. **Peter**

We are fairly well known in the region. We were invited to do a fair bit of publicity and for a while Rachel became the 'go to' girl around any kind of gay issue. Funnily enough, we have now got five or six gay couples in town who also moved here because they saw our media, which is nice. So we created a community in that sense. **Katrina**



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Researched and written by Jacqui Tomlins.

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