

29 January 2010

## MEDIA RELEASE

The annual Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Parade is always colourful, outrageous and political but it is also often peppered with touching stories of courage and coming out. For the first time this year's parade will include a group who call themselves 'ex-gay survivors'. 'Ex-gay' survivors are people, who once believed their homosexuality was evil and attempted to turn from gay to straight through counseling, 'ex-gay' support groups or marriage. Sexual reorientation or conversion therapies are highly controversial and former participants and mental health professionals claim they are harmful.

The American Psychiatric Association ceased practices such as aversion therapy and removed homosexuality from its list of mental disorders in 1973. It was at this time, Christian Churches and ministries saw it as their role to heal people of this 'sickness' and 'ex-gay' ministries were launched. [Exodus](#) was formed in 1976 and has become the global umbrella organization for these ministries.

Some would find it hard to believe that in Australia, in 2010, 'ex-gay' ministries are still able to attract people with the message that homosexuality is a choice, dysfunction and that change is possible, but Anthony Venn-Brown says their existence demonstrates the enormous amount of ignorance that still exists about sexual orientation; particularly in some religious churches.

Venn-Brown was once a leader in the Assemblies of God, and says he's experienced the damage of these programs first hand. In his autobiography '[A Life of Unlearning](#)', he details his 'ex-gay' experience as well as the 16 years of marriage trying to become straight.

'Since the release of my book, I've received 1,000's of emails from readers that begin with the same words "your story is my story". My inbox has become a microscope into a previously hidden world', Venn-Brown said. 'Their stories are like a blue print and include years of internal torment, depression and thoughts of, or attempted suicide. After leaving the programs, participants have deep feelings of failure and shame believing it was their fault they couldn't succeed. Many are left with mental health issues that can take years to heal', Venn-Brown added.

'To get through the maze of self-loathing and ignorance, and finally come out as a proud gay man or lesbian, can be a hazardous journey; tragically not everyone makes it through. So this year [Freedom 2 b\[e\]](#) is celebrating survivor's journeys by encouraging them to march with us in the parade. Not only will this be empowering for those marching, but it also sends a positive message to people still struggling to resolve the perceived conflict between their faith and their sexuality. We are the true survivors, no longer pretending, in denial or living in a prison of self hatred', Venn-Brown concluded.

Further information can be found on the Freedom 2 b[e] website [www.freedom2b.org](http://www.freedom2b.org) or email [survivors@freedom2b.org](mailto:survivors@freedom2b.org)

### More media information available from:

#### Anthony Venn-Brown

Author and Co-founder of Freedom 2 b[e]

Voted one the 25 Most Influential Gay and Lesbian Australians 2007 and 2009

E: [anthony@freedom2b.org](mailto:anthony@freedom2b.org) M: +61 416 015 231

Freedom 2 b[e] is a network of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people  
from Pentecostal, Charismatic and Evangelical Backgrounds  
[www.freedom2b.org](http://www.freedom2b.org)