

# Jersey Shore PFLAG committed to LGBT equality

ABBY MAISONAVE, JERSEY SHORE PFLAG 12:40 p.m. EDT March 16, 2015



**One mother's voice  
changed the world...**

(Photo: Russ DeSantis/CORRESPONDENT)

PFLAG (Parents, Family, Friends and Allies United with LGBT People to Move Equality Forward) has over 350 chapters in the U.S.

Founded in 1972 with the simple act of a mother publicly supporting her gay son, PFLAG is the nation's largest family and ally organization. Uniting people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) with families, friends and allies, PFLAG is committed to advancing equality and full societal affirmation of LGBTQ people through its threefold mission of support, education and advocacy.

Jersey Shore PFLAG, founded in 2004, is the local chapter for Monmouth and Ocean counties, although there are six PFLAG chapters in New Jersey.

JS PFLAG hosts three monthly support meetings that are strictly confidential, nonjudgmental, and offer peer-to-peer support: Toms River (second Wednesday of the month), for LGBTQ individuals and their parents and supporters; Shrewsbury (second Monday of the month), for parents and family members of LGBTQ individuals; and Shrewsbury Transgender/Transfamilies (third Monday of the month), for transgender and gender nonconfirming individuals and their families.

We also have a helpline (908-814-2155) for those who may prefer to talk confidentially prior to coming to a meeting.

Our goal is keeping families together and providing a safe, warm and comforting environment for those who don't know where else to turn, and to be able to speak openly and honestly without fear of being judged or shamed.

Who better to understand you than someone who has gone through what you are dealing with?

PFLAG board members and facilitators are all dedicated volunteers. We do this because we are passionate about helping people and the LGBTQ community.

When we hear someone say something derogatory or hateful about someone who is LGBTQ, we take it personally because you are talking about someone we care about and love. And we hope that the information and the support you receive from us at our meetings will enable you to take that back to your family, to your community, and educate others.

In addition to providing support for families who may be struggling when finding out a loved one is LGBTQ, JS PFLAG also offers support for those struggling to come out, or who have and are encountering difficulties with family, in school, or the work place.



The Jersey Shore PFLAG board is (left to right) Gregory Pilling of Jackson Township, secretary; Michele Nelson of Lawrenceville, vice-president/facilitator; William Gaul of Manchester, fundraising/outreach and facilitator; Abby Maisonave of Howell, president/facilitator; Teri Keynton of Farmingdale, facilitator; and Seth Rainess of Monmouth County, facilitator. (Photo: Russ DeSantis/CORRESPONDENT)

We provide in-service training in the workplace, and do numerous speaking engagements in schools (from kindergarten to post-graduate) with staff, students and Gay Straight Alliances. We also speak to medical professionals dealing with LGBT patients.

Very often a person will come to PFLAG with questions about faith and having an LGBTQ loved one. Although we are not affiliated with any religion, we can help provide support and resources.

Straight allies are welcome in the chapter, as they are the voices for those that sometimes cannot speak up for various reasons out in the community.

JS PFLAG is proud to have been the recipient of a 2014 Resolution by the Senate and General Assembly of New Jersey; the recipient of a 2014 Wells Fargo Community Connection Program Grant; and a 2012 Humanitarian Award by the American Conference on Diversity.

We have done workshops for the Association of Student Assistance Professionals for many years, as well as a workshop for the New Jersey Chapter of the American Academy of

Pediatricians. JS PFLAG co-sponsors many programs with the Central Jersey chapter of Gay Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) and the Ocean County Human Relations Commission. We also have co-sponsored programs with both the Monmouth and Ocean County libraries.

Every year, we take part in community events, including the Pride festival in Asbury Park, and the New Jersey Gay Straight Alliance Forum, presented by GLSEN-Central New Jersey and the Princeton-based HiTOPS.

We are very proud of our PFLAG chapter.



Jersey Shore PFLAG was founded in 2004. (Photo: COURTESY OF JERSEY SHORE PFLAG)

There is nothing more gratifying or validating than when an individual or family tells us how much we've helped them when they were overwhelmed with finding out that their loved one was LGB or T. Or hearing a teacher or physician say "I never thought about it from that perspective."

At the end of the day, it's still your child, your spouse, your friend. And they need your unconditional love and support.

For more information about Jersey Shore PFLAG, visit [www.jerseyshorepflag.org](http://www.jerseyshorepflag.org) or send an email to [jspflag@gmail.com](mailto:jspflag@gmail.com).

Abby Maisonave of Howell is the president of Jersey Shore PFLAG and the North Atlantic Regional Director for PFLAG National.

## **PFLAG**

PFLAG envisions a world where diversity is celebrated and all people are respected, valued and affirmed inclusive of their sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.

**MISSION:** By meeting people where they are and collaborating with others, PFLAG realizes its vision through support for families, allies and people who are LGBTQ; education for ourselves and others about the issues and challenges facing people who are LGBTQ; and advocacy in our communities to change attitudes and create policies and laws that achieve full equality for people who are LGBTQ.