

# Out, Proud and Together — Families Will Gather in Malibu for SoCal's First Jewish LGBT Weekend Retreat

By Ashley Zeldin, Contributing Writer | PUBLISHED Apr 4, 2012 | Community

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Children being raised in lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) families are likely to face some pretty awkward questions from their peers: How come you have two mommies? How were you born if you have only dads? Who lights the candles at your house?

Rabbi Lisa Edwards of Beth Chayim Chadashim (BCC), the world's oldest LGBT synagogue, says kids might encounter a whole range of attitudes, including jealousy and bullying, which is why her synagogue, along with Congregation Kol Ami and other local Jewish institutions, has initiated Southern California's first Jewish LGBT Family Shabbaton.

The landmark weekend will unite Jewish LGBT families from across the Southland at the Shalom Institute in Malibu from April 20 to 22.

The Shabbaton, which has the support of more than 20 congregations and organizations, was organized at the request of LGBT families themselves, Edwards said.

“It's something LGBT families feel a need and desire for even though they have been welcomed into mainstream communities,” she said. “A weekend like this will let them know that their family is a lot like other families.”

Rod Bran and John Scoles, members of both BCC and Temple Israel of Hollywood, are looking forward to attending with their 6-year-old daughter,

Katie.

“It’s nice for similar families to experience a community environment where we’re not being judged by others that our families are different,” Bran said.

He says Katie has been told by other kids “that she can’t be alive if she has two dads. But when she goes to a camp like this, her situation is typical.”

The weekend will include traditional Jewish camp activities such as Shabbat and Havdalah services, song sessions and campfires, hikes and zip lining, arts and crafts, yoga and gardening, as well as opportunities to discuss issues affecting LGBT families in a safe, welcoming and supportive environment.

According to Leah Zimmerman, director of education at BCC, discussions will address the various compositions of LGBT families — whether formed through adoption, fostering or surrogacy — and questions of multiracial and multifaith identity, as seen through a Jewish lens in a heteronormative world.

“It’s realizing that you are a part of a larger conversation and a larger community,” said Zimmerman, who is an ally of the LGBT community, along with her husband and their two daughters. “Bringing people together from different congregations helps to create a stronger LGBT community. Our kids see themselves as part of BCC, but what I’m interested in doing for them is helping them see themselves as part of a larger Jewish community, and know that BCC is not the only place that recognizes them as Jewish and invites them to be part of the community.”

Although many local synagogues are welcoming toward LGBT individuals and families, most don’t offer relevant activities and programs because there isn’t enough demand or resources.

There are no official programs to support LGBT congregants at Adat Ari El in Valley Village, and for this reason, the LGBT Jewish Family weekend has the

congregation's endorsement.

“These families are Jewish, and want support and strength from our tradition. They want opportunities to connect with one another,” said Senior Rabbi Jonathan Jaffe Bernhard, who has been with Temple Adat Ari El for 15 years. “The shabbaton is a wonderful way to create these opportunities for them.”

“We want to reinforce the idea that you don't have to choose between your faith and your family,” said BCC Executive Director Felicia Park-Rogers, who has two sons with her partner, Leo Baeck Temple Assistant Rabbi Rachel Timoner. “Judaism in its broadest form is so welcoming of families based on commitment and love, following the principles and ethics and traditions of Judaism.”

The organizers are hoping the weekend turns into an annual event.

“So often when you start something, you don't know if it's going to be the first and only or the first of many,” Edwards said. “Hopefully this will be the first of many.”

Registration deadline is April 5. For more information and to register for the weekend visit [shalominstitute.com](http://shalominstitute.com).