

Coming out now safer for TEU members.

Warwick Anderson, TEU Rainbow Te Kahukura advisory group member, reflects on the 30th anniversary of homosexual law reform

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Coming out is not a single act but a process they goes on and on, each new iteration bringing a new emotional issue, says Warwick Anderson from TEU's Rainbow Te Kahukura network.

These days Anderson is an academic at the University of Canterbury, but before homosexual law reform he was teaching at Greymouth High School.

"Although I was out and active in Christchurch I was pretty quiet about being gay on the West Coast," says Anderson. That was until the lead up to a staff formal dinner where someone was selling raffle tickets with the words 'No Homos' written on them.

Anderson came out to a colleague who immediately organised a boycott of the dinner and most staff went to an informal protest dinner instead. Anderson came out big-time as a result of that and made friends with a number of gay Coasters and wrote letters to the Greymouth Evening Star in the lead-up to Law Reform.

"Staff at the school were actually very friendly and accepting. But that had not been my impression when I first arrived."

Anderson had already been active, campaigning for gay and lesbian rights in Christchurch where he teamed his advocacy up with another strong unionist and gay rights activist, Robin Duff.

Anderson says he remembers arguing with born-again Christians in Cathedral Square who would shout 'God loves you' through bared teeth.

He returned to the University of Canterbury to retrain in 1986, and became an organiser in the Gay University Students' Society (GUSS), which held monthly dances.

"That ran for a few years and was a lot of fun. Some of the biggest dances attracted 200 or 250 people."

By the late 1980s, Anderson was helping host a five-minute segment of local gay news on student radio. With some friends, he helped turn that five minutes into a half hour show of news and music.

The show grew and changed stations to community radio, where it became a one-hour show called Outwaves, and ran for ten years.

Anderson says a number of the folk who were involved with the radio programmes and other gay rights activities in the 1980s and 1990s went on to become active members of TEU and of other unions. John Miller, for instance, is now an organiser for the NZ Nurses Organisation.

These days Anderson is an active member of TEU Rainbow Te Kahukura which not only celebrates the diversity of TEU's lesbian, gay, bisexual, takataapui, fa'fafine transgender and intersex members, but works to make sure that TEU's collective agreements and policies reflect the needs and issues of this group of members.

This week he is working to make sure that the University of Canterbury's equity and diversity celebrations include a gay, lesbian and bisexual angle.

It's a great time to join the TEU

teu@teu.ac.nz | 04 801 5098 | 178 Willis St, Te Aro, Wellington 6011