

## Around Britain

### Store wins right to open

#### NEWCASTLE

LGB lifestyle store Clone Zone is to open its 10th branch British branch in Newcastle's gay quarter in early February. The shop will sell books, clothes, adult toys, DVDs and music. Proposals for the branch were fought by local groups, including the Christian Institute.

### Rugby, runners and drag

#### LONDON

There's a music night on 7 February in aid of the Terrence Higgins Trust at the Kings Arms in Poland St, London W1, with featured acts including drag idol winners Crystal d'Canter and Kelly Mild and indie performers PJ and In Camera. Manhunt's muscle-boys, King's Cross Steelers' rugby lads and the London Frontrunners will all be there enjoying the music too.

### Sharing memories

#### SHREWSBURY

A film of the play Gateway to Heaven, about the memories of older lesbians and gay men, will be shown in Shropshire during gay history month. The showing will be followed by a discussion about the needs of older LGBT people. Admission is free. The film starts at 7pm on 20 February at Shropshire County Library Service at The Lantern on Meadow Farm Drive in Shrewsbury. Contact 01743 255 005.

### Just like a prayer

#### MANCHESTER

Women are invited to an afternoon discussion on prayer hosted by the Manchester branch of Quest on 2 February. A priest will lead a talk from 2.30 until 5pm at the Friends Meeting House in central Manchester, and a mass will then be held. Participants will be asked to contribute £5 towards the cost of the room. Contact 07983 021 589.

### Winter melodies

#### BRIGHTON

Harpist Andrew Ballantyne will be performing a concert at the invitation of GEMS, Brighton's group for older gay men and women, as part of Winter Pride. Classical and popular favourites will be performed at Dorset Gardens Methodist Church on 2 February at 7pm. Tickets are £3 on the door.

### Health experts wanted

#### WOLVERHAMPTON

Wolverhampton is hosting a queer health and wellbeing show on 23 February. If you would like a stall and are qualified in nutritional advice, personal fitness training, aromatherapy, reiki, Indian head massage, massage therapy, counselling or psychotherapy, contact matthew.keogh@tht.org.uk.

### Art records journeys

#### MANCHESTER

North west lesbians of all ages are being invited to take part in an art project to help break down the stereotypical images of lesbians. The Lesbian Community Project will be running workshops between February and July, and women are invited to attend and record their lesbian "journeys". The exhibition, Engage, will tour the region this winter. Contact the LCP on mail@manchesterlcp.org.uk.

### We need dahlings

#### BIRMINGHAM

Acting Out theatre group is open to men and women who have a commitment to acting and enjoy the thrill of the stage, or who want to help out backstage. It is also interested in hearing from anyone who would like to help with writing scripts or handling publicity. Contact ajgcooper@ukonline.co.uk.

# TAUNTS MAY HAVE LED TO SCHOOLGIRL'S DEATH

By Steve Bustin  
SOUTH COAST  
CORRESPONDENT

A teenage schoolgirl who was found hanging from a tree by her own scarf two weeks ago may have been the victim of homophobic bullying.

Friends of Belinda Allen, 14, said she had been bullied at Tanbridge House School in Horsham and that taunts often included insinuations about her sexuality.

One 15-year-old, who asked not to be named, has been quoted in

national papers saying that Allen was bullied "by a variety of different people at school" because she was perceived to be gay.

"People picked on her because she was a bit different. She was very quiet, but she was teased about her name and what she wore. She liked wearing dresses rather than trendy outfits and the bullies called her a lesbian," said the friend.

"I knew she was being bullied, but I didn't know how badly she had taken it. On the outside she was happy and bubbly."

Another pupil at the school,

11-year-old Ben Vodden, hanged himself a year earlier after bullying from pupils and one of the school bus drivers, who has been reported to still work for the same company.

The headmaster of the school, who was appointed after Vodden's death, has denied that Allen's death was as a result of bullying.

"I need to go on record and make it absolutely clear that despite the worst efforts of some sections of the media, Belinda's death is not related in any way to bullying," said Jules White.

"Sensitivity to her family and the restraint that a school should show prevents me from putting into the public domain what I know to be true. I can confirm, however, that the police and all relevant agencies have categorically confirmed that bullying was not an issue in this case."

The school has an anti-bullying policy, but though the 1,500 word statement acknowledges harassment because of "gender, ethnic origin, physical/social disability, or personality, etc.", it makes no reference to sexuality.



The Pink Singers, a lesbian and gay choir, sang alongside their French lesbian and gay counterparts Equinox, at Marylebone's Dukas Hall, Royal Academy of Music, London on 19 January. The British group is celebrating its 25th birthday, making it Europe's oldest lesbian and gay choir. The British and French choirs sang together twice last year in December at two concerts in Paris. For forthcoming events check out pinkingsingers.co.uk.

Photo by Scott Namm.



## New theatre offerings from Luvvies

By Darren Scott  
SCOTLAND  
CORRESPONDENT

Gender transition and the Stone-wall riots are on the programme in Scotland's first queer theatre company's plans for the year.

The Edinburgh-based Luvvies is holding auditions for Painted Eggs, a stage performance about the transsexual journey of John to Joan, at SOLAS, Abbeymount on 2 February from 4pm.

Writers are also welcome for two new pieces, Queer and This Year's Thing, as part of the LuvvieBabes group. This Year's Thing will take an Edinburgh twist to the Stone-wall riots, with the Luvvies hoping to stage this new work in time for the 40th anniversary of the event next year.

An audio drama, Puppies, about the gay scene in Scotland's capital, is also on the cards.

For more information see their website.

jobs.PinkPaper.com

## FORMER STREET KID RETURNS TO HELP TEENS

By Sarah McDermott

An equality campaigner who as a teenager spent time living on the streets has a new job helping down and out youths.

Kat Louis, formerly the NUS LGBT women's officer, left her family home aged 16 and lived rough in between stints staying with friends.

She managed to complete a sixth form course in Scarborough and get a degree from Leicester's De Montfort University, and then a qualification in youth work.

Now, she will work with teenagers in some of Manchester's most deprived areas for the charity Rathbone.

The group says it has helped gay teenagers gain confidence and qualifications, such as Belma, who built confidence and self-discipline as a member of a local cheerleading squad after being bullied at school.

Tariq, a young Iranian who had been persecuted for his sexuality, was able to gain literacy and numeracy qualifications with the help of the centre.

The centre manager for Rathbone in Manchester said that Louis' life experience and skills made her ideal for her new role.

"I am convinced Kat will offer hope to teenagers who may have previously been written off," said Janet Burke.