



## Waiting to Conceive: Conversations about Fertility Services

Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> September

This informal evening of discussion and peer support was provided as part of our ongoing series of events for LGBTQI parents, carers and those who looking to start a family.

Facilitated by Rainbow Families Project staff, the aim was to provide a safe and supportive space for people to chat about their experiences of, and questions about fertility services, either privately or NHS funded.

### The event

12 people attended to share experience and stories, ask questions and provide reassurance to others. Many of the participants were awaiting treatment, or just thinking about it. One participant parent was invited as a guest speaker, to share their story of conceiving their child through a fertility service.

Discussion topics included, 'fertility services options', 'donor sperm' 'the process of treatment', 'disclosure', 'impact on wellbeing' and 'impact on relationships'. Throughout the event, those who had experience of services and treatment cycles, contributed their own personal words of encouragement, which we have collated below.

### Words of encouragement

#### Before you begin the process

*Experiences with staff can be really positive - most clinics are very familiar with LGBT couples*

*Be patient with yourself*

*Talk to your partner/s about how it's affecting you, and ask them too*

*Understand that statistics aren't helpful and not always relevant, particularly if you have no knowledge of a fertility problem*

*Don't over inform yourself - too much information is overwhelming and can over-work your brain... this can be stressful and unhelpful for the process*

*Get excited, but be kind to yourself and prepare to need support*

*NHS waiting lists are about 1 year long in Scotland... even if you're just 'thinking' about it, it may be worth asking for a referral. You can always take your name off the list if you're not ready, but when you are ready, the year-long wait feels like a very long time*

*Private treatment is expensive, it's not therefore right for everybody. Private clinics are no more successful than NHS ones... there's just obviously less of a wait and you get offered a cup of tea more often!*

NHS treatment criteria requires you to be a certain BMI (above 18.5 and below 30), which can be really distressing and feel like a huge barrier if you don't meet this. Be kind to yourself. It's NOT a reflection of how healthy or how fertile you are. However, speak to your friends, maybe your GP or others you trust, to explore how you can help to reduce or increase yours.

### During the process

*Keep romance alive! Where possible, make clinic days, date days!*

*Think about your boundaries - time off work / commitments can be healthy for your fertility*

*Don't put your whole life on hold - get on with other parts of your life (friends, family, hobbies etc) you can always change or cancel plans*

*Find additional wellbeing support - massage, yoga, mindfulness, sports, cat videos on YouTube, or binging on your favourite TV programme!*

*Try not to spend lots of money on pregnancy tests - the wait for results can be really difficult, but self-testing can create tension be very stressful*

*Think about back-up plans and think about your future with an open mind*

*Remember that families are created in many different ways. Unsuccessful treatment cycles do not have to stop you having a family*

*Be mindful about over-sharing - think about who you need/would like to tell. It can feel difficult when too many people know about what you're doing because they can ask questions (even supportively) when you don't to think or talk about it*

### Using NHS allocated donor sperm

*NHS Lothian has a donor insemination programme, so you can access donor sperm for free, as part of your fertility treatment. They have to allocate this to you though (you can't choose!) so be prepared for a different experience to searching and sourcing your own.*

*We spent a long time spent searching and choosing a sperm donor from the European Sperm Bank. The ESB gave us LOTS of information about our donor. After a few unsuccessful private cycles, we eventually moved to the NHS Lothian funded treatment and a new allocated donor as part of their programme. Interestingly, we really didn't mind not knowing so much about the new donor, because we focused on having a family and a successful treatment cycle.*

*Re: NHS Lothian donor insemination programme, ask questions and ask to speak to the donor team about it. The NHS EFREC staff are very kind, approachable and supportive, but they're also really busy, so you may wish to ask for more information than they give you.*

## Useful resources

### Key information and resources for those trying to become parents

Fertility Network UK - <http://fertilitynetworkuk.org/for-those-trying-to-become-parents/information/>

Co-parents.co.uk - <https://www.coparents.co.uk/sperm-donors-laws-in-UK.php>

### General information from the UK's independent regulator of fertility treatment and research using human embryos

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority - <https://www.hfea.gov.uk/>

### Fertility Services in Scotland

NHS funded - Edinburgh Assisted Conception Programme:  
[Edinburgh Fertility & Reproductive Endocrine Centre \(EFREC\)](#)

NHS funded - Greater Glasgow and Clyde Assisted Conception Service:  
[Glasgow Royal Fertility Clinic](#)

NHS funded - Dundee Assisted Conception Unity  
<http://www.acudundee.org/>

NHS funded - Aberdeen Fertility Centre  
<https://www.aberdeenfertility.org.uk/>

NHS funded - NHS Highland  
<http://www.nhshighland.scot.nhs.uk/Publications/Pages/IVFtreatment.aspx>

Privately funded - Glasgow Centre for Reproductive Medicine (GCRM)  
<http://www.gcrm.co.uk/>

Privately funded - Nuffield Health Glasgow Hospital Fertility Services  
<https://www.nuffieldhealth.com/hospitals/glasgow/fertility>

Privately funded - The Edinburgh Clinic (in partnership with GCRM)  
<https://www.edinburghclinic.com/services/fertility-clinic/>

### Private donor sperm banks and information (please note not an exhaustive list)

Useful information guides on a range of fertility treatment and options, including sperm banks and sperm donation - <https://www.coparents.co.uk/sperm-banks.php>

London Sperm Bank - <http://www.londonspermbank.com/>

The London Women's Clinic - <http://www.londonwomensclinic.com/fertility-treatments/sperm-donation.htm>

Fairfax Cryobank - <http://www.fairfaxcryobank.co.uk/>

European Sperm Bank - <https://www.europeanspermbank.com/en/>

California Cryobank (for UK clients) - <http://www.cryobankuk.co.uk/>

## Support

Free - Information and 1:1 support - Rainbow Families Project (Edinburgh or Glasgow)

Meet and chat with staff from the Rainbow Families Project, to ask for information, a confidential chat about your situation or for a supportive space for emotional support.

Privately funded - Counselling - Pink Therapy Directory~  
<http://www.pinktherapy.com/>

NHS funded - Counselling - available in as part of your fertility treatment. Check relevant website for details

Free - LGBT Helpline Scotland - 0300 123 2523

Provides information and emotional support to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and their families, friends and supporters across Scotland.  
<http://www.lgbthealth.org.uk/helpline/>