



OPEN HEARTS • OPEN MINDS • OPEN DOORS

The Jewish Welcome Network provides outreach consultation and resources to synagogues, agencies and Jewish schools of all denominations and affiliations in the Bay Area.

Our mission is to assist organizations in their welcome and engagement of interfaith families, the LGBT community, Jews of Color and all those who are interested in exploring Judaism and Jewish culture.

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1190 Green St.
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Celebrating LGBT Voices



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**“Who is honored and respected?
One who honors and respects others.”**

(Pirkey Avot 4:1)

The Jewish Welcome Network would like to thank Jewish Mosaic and the individuals who generously shared their stories with us, and the LGBT Alliance for contributing the cover photo. Together we bring you voices from the Bay Area gay and lesbian community who have found inclusion and comfort in synagogue life.



Kenny Altman
San Francisco, CA

The former president of Congregation Beth Sholom (and that congregation’s first openly gay president), Kenny started *Keshet*, a gay and lesbian *chavurah* and outreach program of Congregation Beth Sholom, in 1997. Kenny came back to Judaism in mid-life, looking for support while caring for a friend with AIDS dementia. Always comfortable with Conservative Judaism, he wanted to join Beth Sholom, but did not want to “edit” himself. He found the congregation and Rabbi Alan Lew z’l” to be very open to listening and to change.

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Kenny has been the Director of Operations for Parents Place, a program of Jewish Family and Children’s Services, since 1995. He spends evenings and weekends performing stand-up comedy and teaching Torah trope to both children and adults. “I realize how incredibly lucky I am. I decided I wanted to join a Conservative Synagogue and I just ended up in the right place. I found community in my job and in my synagogue. I want people who are struggling with their iden-

Sharon is happily married to her *bashert* Amber Weiss, a Jew by Choice. Sharon and Amber were “married” in August 2005, and legally married in June 2008. Previously, they were members at a Reform synagogue.

When you go to a new synagogue, what do you look for to feel welcome?

Sharon and Amber have recently moved and are currently “synagogue shopping.”

“There are many things that are important to us as we are looking for a synagogue to join. In addition to appreciating when someone warmly greets us, other things that are very important to us in a synagogue are:

- Having *Chavurot* where LGBT singles, couples and families are welcome. At the synagogue we had previously joined, we asked three times to join one of their *Chavurot*, but they never put us in one. As a young lesbian couple without kids, it seemed they didn’t seem to know where to put us, and it was very hurtful to us.
- Having LGBT people visible in synagogue leadership (staff or lay leaders)
- Mentioning that they are LGBT welcoming in community advertisements and membership brochures
- Taking a stand on LGBT issues like gay marriage
- Being visible at LGBT events like Pride
- Either planning or organizing groups to go to Jewish LGBT events

Additionally, the language that people use can make us feel welcome. Using language (both in conversation and on all administrative forms) that honors and acknowledges our relationship is important.”

Andrew is a prolific writer and has authored seven books including the bestsellers *Ask Your Angels* and *Two Flutes Playing*. His next book, *Queering the Text: Biblical, Medieval and Modern Jewish Stories*, will be released in late 2009 and will be published by White Crane Press.

When you go to a new synagogue, what do you look for to feel welcome?

“Someone who will come up to me in the oneg room and say, ‘Hi.’ As a gay man, I want to find a reflection of my gayness in the liturgy; an LGBT chavurah, classes, a recognition of Pride, an affiliation with a queer organization.”



Sharon Papo
San Francisco, CA

Through youth groups, camp, Israel trips and Hillel, Sharon has been actively involved in the Jewish community throughout her life. To her, family always meant community, gatherings and holiday celebrations. However, in college, after Sharon “came out,” she felt fragmented after experiencing

homophobia in the Jewish community. In her senior year in college, Sharon co-organized a Jewish LGBT conference that was very healing for her. Sharon has remained passionately involved through working with queer youth, teaching Hebrew school, and training Jewish organizations about diversity. Currently, Sharon is the director of an adolescent health clinic and youth center.

ties to know that there are many places where they can belong as Jews.”

When you go to a new synagogue, what do you look for to feel welcome?

“I make sure there is a gay and lesbian presence by talking to the leadership, the clergy and looking through the marketing materials. Especially in Conservative congregations, it’s not only saying you have LGBT members, but having a special outreach program. It should be clear than anyone who wants Conservative Judaism is welcome here, not only at Congregation Beth Shalom, but at Conservative synagogues in general in San Francisco and the Bay Area.”



Noach Dzmura
Berkeley, CA

“If you met me at Kiddush, you would see a chubby young man with a beard that hasn’t grown in yet. But I have 35 years of experience living as a woman, and eleven as a man. The challenge then, is how much of that complicated past can I tell you before you choke on your *challah*?” Noach feels most welcome in a Jewish classroom, where students are expected to express diverse opinions, secure in the knowledge that their words will be valued by

teacher and peers. A Jew by Choice, Noach had a Reform conversion, but feels very comfortable in Conservative and Renewal communities.

Noach was granted the Haas/Koshland Memorial Award in 2006, an annual grant that funds a year of study and personal development in Israel.

When you go to a new synagogue, what do you look for to feel welcome?

“I look for educational opportunities, not just those taught by rabbis but also by members of the synagogue. I look for diversity in the regular services because diversity in services means diversity in the welcoming of different people. And I look for who’s there: does even one person in the congregation look like me?”



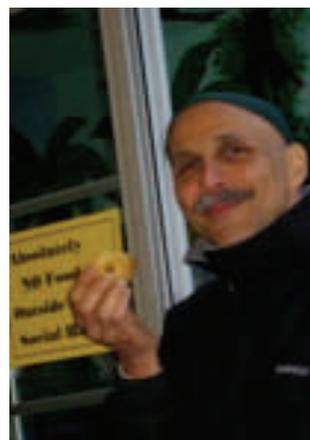
Naomi Fine
Palo Alto, CA

As a young woman, Naomi felt alienated from her Conservative Jewish upbringing. After law school, she was introduced to the Jewish Renewal movement and came back to Judaism. She was first very involved in Kehilla Community Synagogue and then in Chochmat HaLev, both in the East Bay. After moving to the Peninsula to be with her wife Kathy, they co founded Mishkan LaLev, a Renewal community on the Peninsula. Naomi is deeply connected to the Jewish community and is currently focusing her energy on fighting for marriage equality.

Naomi and her wife Kathy Levinson have two children, Reade 16 and Parker 13. Both children attended Gedeon Hausner Jewish Hebrew Day School where Kathy was president in 2005.

When you go to a new synagogue, what do you look for to feel welcome?

I look for an inclusive and spiritually welcoming community where the rabbi performs marriages for same-sex couples and takes a visible and vocal stand in the community to lead the ongoing fight for social justice, including marriage equality and equal civil rights for LGBTQQ individuals.



Andrew Ramer
San Francisco, CA

With a mother from a Communist family and a father from an Orthodox family, Andrew describes his Jewish experience as both spiritual (from the Communist side) and practical (from the Orthodox side). Andrew planned to go to rabbinic school, but changed his mind after coming out in 1973, saying he knew he couldn't go back in the closet. He notes, “I never thought things would change as much as they have in my lifetime.” After exploring various spiritual paths, Andrew felt drawn back to Judaism. He found Congregation Sha’ar Zahav, where he says, “This is the first community where I’m able to be gay and Jewish under the same roof. I was accepted in other places, but I didn’t want to be *accepted*. I want to *belong*.”