

q feature: **FAMILIES THROUGH SURROGACY**

What Happened to Gay Men Accepting They'd Never Have Children?

Sam Everingham looks at how gay families are forming and how this will be reflected in Australia's annual surrogacy conference coming up in Melbourne on 3-4 June.

Fourteen years ago it was a Melbourne couple who became the first gay Australians to father children via surrogacy. In the next four years, just a handful followed their lead in the USA. But in the last seven years the number of gay singles and couples embracing surrogacy has exploded, thanks to growing awareness, growing equality and more affordable programs in the US, Canada and developing nations.

However some gay dads take a long time to find community. I had a single dad from Perth call me a fortnight ago, raising twins via offshore surrogacy. In the four years since their birth, he'd never met another family who had required surrogacy, let alone a gay dad. He felt isolated.

Learning that there are Gay Dads social groups in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth, he was delighted. In NSW the last twelve months has even seen Rainbow Families, once a lesbian stronghold, embracing gay-parented families in everything from board membership to camping weekends; from play and social groups to Mardi Gras parade entries. (At the last Rainbow Families meet-up I attended, there were more gay than lesbian-led families)

The latest estimates put the number of Australian children created via surrogacy to gay men at well over a thousand. Many have fathered one child via India or Nepal and a second via Thailand or Cambodia. But with many developing nations now closed to surrogacy, there has been renewed interest in engaging in Australia and the US. The US remains superior in regard to good screening and surrogate management. But cost pressures have also led to USA hybrid programs, where US surrogates undertake IVF procedures in cheaper destinations such as Cyprus, Mexico and India. And anecdotal reports show Australian surrogates prefer carrying for gay rather than straight singles and couples.

Key lessons I learned early on about creating a family as a gay dad were doing your research, talking to other families and patience. IVF processes cannot guarantee pregnancy, though there are decisions around choice of egg donor and clinic can raise your success rates.

Nine gay dads from Sydney, Melbourne, Perth and abroad will share their own journeys to parenthood in Australia, US, Canada and Asia - at Families Through Surrogacy's annual conference on 3-4 June in Melbourne. Andy & Simon are one such couple who determinedly worked through a range of surrogacy arrangements – international, domestic, gestational and traditional, to arrive at parenthood. After a few unsuccessful attempts with Andy's sister-in-law as their surrogate, they took up their egg donor Carla Pincombe's offer to carry for them, using her own eggs – a method called traditional surrogacy. Their perseverance paid off when they became dads in late March 2017. Their surrogate will share her perspective, as well as expert doctors, lawyers, psychologists and agencies.

Amidst the talks, food and socialising, singles and couples will be making the most vital decisions of their lives – how to build a family. To find out more, go to families thrusurrogacy.com/australia Weekend passes start from \$120 per person, including lunches and evening drinks.

