



Highland Rainbow Folk

Working with older lesbians, gay men, bisexual men and women and transgender people (LGBT) in the North of Scotland

AM I SURE...?

...do I give people an opening
to be something outside of
my assumptions?



A leaflet produced by Highland Rainbow Folk
for those who work in Health and Social Care

They assumed I was straight. When my partner arrived to visit he had to explain before being allowed in. (gay man 75yrs)



The nurse ticked the single box on the form. I have been with my partner for 15 years! (lesbian 69yrs)



I struggle to have a bath but I worry about having anyone in. They won't understand. (transwoman 67yrs)

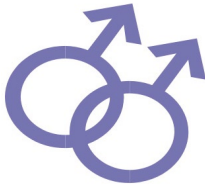


Care staff sniggered when they found female clothing in a cupboard. (cross dresser 82yrs)



WHO WE ARE...

Highland Rainbow Folk is a working group established by *Help the Aged in Scotland* and *Terrence Higgins Trust* following a story-telling event in February 2009.



We are a cross-generation group of lesbians, gay men, bisexual men and women and transgendered people who live and work in the north of Scotland.

Our aim is to raise awareness of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) issues amongst providers of services for older people. We hope to achieve this by producing resources such as this booklet, a DVD and a training pack.



For more information about Highland Rainbow Folk please contact:

Suzy Gentle (Age Scotland)
telephone 01309 673455
suzy.gentle@agescotland.org.uk

"At a Christmas dinner a family member said that gay people were perverts. My daughter quietly replied 'my mother is not a pervert, please don't call her that'" (bisexual woman age 69yrs)

WHAT WE BELIEVE...

We believe that care professionals want to provide the best for those they care for and will therefore be open to information and support on how to achieve this with older lesbians, gay men, bisexual men and women, and transgendered individuals.

Older LGBT people will have many of the same issues as other older people. But we may have experience of prejudice and discrimination and therefore feel more isolated and disconnected from the rest of society.

"When my older gay partner and my teenage son from a previous marriage came to the hospital with me, my partner was asked if he was my father. When he said 'no', that he was my partner, the reaction of the staff made him feel they thought he couldn't be trusted around teenagers and children." (gay man)

We hope that this leaflet will reveal hidden issues, inspire greater consideration, provide practical information and generally increase the awareness that care staff bring to their work, that we may have a better experience of life in our later years.

"I was really nervous when going for an internal examination. I went with my partner. When I introduced her to the nurse, the nurse asked if I would like her to be with me. The Nurse seemed not to make any judgments and it made such a difference to me." (lesbian age 72yrs)

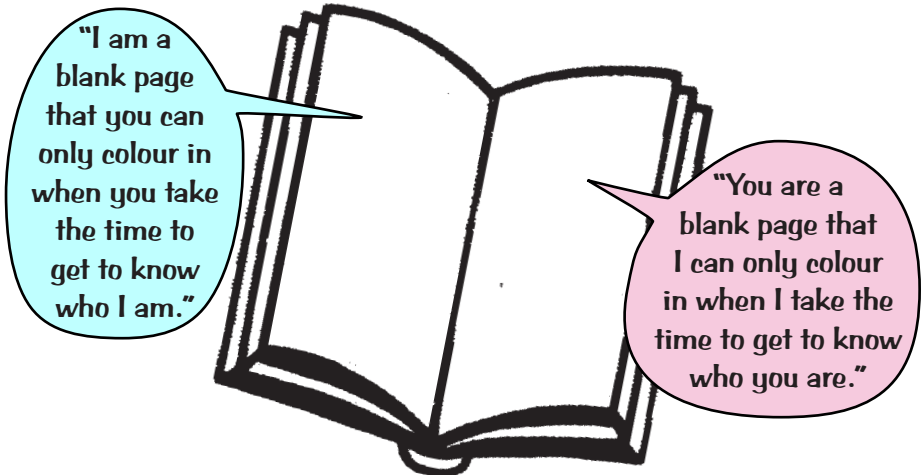
Concerns raised by older LGBT people...

- fear of a negative reaction from staff when 'coming out'
- assumptions made that everyone is heterosexual
- not having families of choice recognised
- being separated from a partner
- being treated with less dignity and respect
- being seen only through the filter of our LGBT 'identity'

When enquiring about next of kin or marital status, it might be more helpful to ask open questions such as, "*Who are the significant people in your life?*" and, "*What are the significant relationships in your life?*"

Please remember to be sensitive to privacy
and
careful about your personal curiosity.

Do you need to know what you are asking?



Assumptions can disempower, cause offence and hurt!

None of us likes to be misrepresented.

It is impossible to know who someone is - how they like to be seen and represented - just by their appearance.

Confidence and the honesty to admit to uncertainty are necessary for a sensitive and respectful enquiry that empowers everyone.

We need the opportunity to reveal to you what we think you need to know about our sexuality or gender identity.

You need the opportunity to consider whether you are treating me as an individual...
...or making assumptions.

Some common assumptions...

"I've never met anyone who's gay."

"I've never seen a transsexual."

Are you sure? How would you know?

"Any man who wears women's clothes must be gay."

Are you sure?

Remember, gender identity and sexual orientation are two very different things.

“Gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender relationships don’t last.”

Are you sure?

Where does this information come from? Many people have relationships that last for many years that are neither recognised nor celebrated because of fear of discrimination.

“Older people aren’t interested in sex so they don’t need sexual health advice.”

Are you sure?

Society is uncomfortable with older people talking about sex. However, for some, for the whole of their lives, expressing themselves sexually is important.

“It’s all about sex.”

Are you sure?

Just as sex does not define a heterosexual relationship, neither does it define a gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender relationship.

“People who cross dress have a mental health problem.”

Are you sure?

Mental health issues are often a consequence of lack of acceptance due to others’ prejudice and discrimination.

Sexuality and Gender Identity

An issue which can often cause confusion is the relationship between our sexuality* and our gender identity.

Whilst we all have both a sexuality (gay/lesbian/bisexual/straight) *and* a gender identity (male/female/transgender), these are not always perceived as separate and distinct parts of who we are.

For example, we might express our sexuality as follows... *“I am a female and attracted to another female”, “I am a female and attracted to a male”, “I am a male and attracted to another male”, “I am a male and attracted to a female”, “I am a female and attracted to either a male or another female,” “I am a male and attracted to either a female or another male.”* These are expressions of sexual orientation.

It is important not to assume a person’s sexual orientation - better to allow them to reveal this for themselves... *if this is both relevant and they wish to do so.*

Our gender identity, on the other hand, describes the gender we identify with. This may or may not align with our physical appearance or society’s expectation of us. Someone may look female and identify as male, or vice versa... or neither!

Like sexuality, gender identity can be fluid and may manifest aspects of both genders, or neither. ‘Transgender’ is the term generally used to describe all expressions of gender identity, including transexuality, transvestism, cross dressing and intersex. Again, it is important to listen to the individual.

* The terms sexuality and sexual orientation are both used in this brochure in the context of attraction and relationships. Language is powerful and we have endeavoured to use it with care.

Our sexuality and our gender identity are a part of who each of us is. But please don’t make an assumption about which sexuality goes with which gender identity. Thank you.

**Some
assumptions
about LGBT
health...**

“Lesbians don’t need cervical smear tests as regularly as other women in their age group.”

“Transgendered people don’t have children.”

“Gay men are the main cause of HIV infection spreading through communities.”

“Lesbians don’t need to practice safe sex.”

Older People and Sexual Health

Another aspect of older lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people’s lives often overlooked is that of sexual health. We believe sexual health to be not only the absence of disease or infection but also “a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being related to sexuality” as defined by the World Health Organisation. This statement means that the sexual rights of all persons must be protected, respected and fulfilled irrespective of age, gender or sexuality.

Like everyone else, many older lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people are now enjoying healthy sex lives for longer than ever. The reasons for this are multiple and varied but may be in part due to new drugs to counter erectile dysfunction and increasing use of online services. It may be also due to the fact that many of us are simply living longer than ever.

While you may be aware that rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in the United Kingdom are on the rise, you may be surprised to learn that the increases are not restricted to young people.

A recent study by the Health Protection Agency has shown that rates of sexually transmitted infections amongst over 45s have doubled in the last eight years from 16.7 per hundred thousand to 36.3 per hundred thousand. The study also showed that men were more likely to be affected, with increases in herpes, syphilis, gonorrhoea and genital warts. Indeed, almost half of the nearly five thousand diagnoses were for genital warts. Within the over 45 age group the figures show that men aged 55 to 59 years of age were the most likely to to have an STI.

"I looked after my older sister. The council sent a young female support worker to take me out to relieve me from caring for an afternoon. I am a lesbian and have never been out to my family. This young woman was so relaxed and comfortable with me and interested in me as an individual, that it made it comfortable for me to come out. We had great afternoons with me able to tell her of all the places me and my female partner used to go." (lesbian 78yrs.)



It's worth remembering that sex is not the preserve of the young and that sexually transmitted infections are no respecters of age. Using a condom or some other form of barrier protection is relevant to anybody sexually active be they sixteen or sixty.

For older lesbians, gay men, bisexual men and women, and transgender people, who are still sexually active, having healthy sex lives is positive and we believe has a contribution to make to our overall sense of wellbeing.



"My family doesn't accept my relationship between me and my younger male partner. They outed me to my church and now I feel very isolated." (widowed, bisexual man, 79 yrs)

Sources of Information and Support

HIGHLAND LGBT FORUM

www.gay-ness.org.uk

SWANS

A self supporting group for transpeople in the North of Scotland

www.spanglefish.com/swansofscotland

GIRLZONE

A social group for lesbians, bisexual and trans women

girlzone@gay-ness.org.uk

AGE SCOTLAND

PO BOX 5897

Forres IV36 1WD

Tel: 01309 673455

TERRENCE HIGGINS TRUST

For information about HIV/AIDS and sexual health matters call THT direct on 0845 1221200

www.tht.org.uk

EQUALITY NETWORK

National LGBT Campaigning organisation

30 Bernard Street

Edinburgh

EH6 6PR

en@equality-network.org

Tel: 07020933952

LGBT HISTORY MONTH

www.lgbthistory.org.uk

Highland Rainbow Folk wish to acknowledge the support and encouragement given by the following organisations:

Girlzone
Highland LGBT Forum
LGBT History Month
LGBT Youth
Equality Network
OurStory Scotland
Highland and Islands Equality Forum
Swans
Moray Health & Social Care Partnership
Highland Council
NHS Highland
Northern Constabulary

“My greatest fear would be to get to the end of my life, having done lots of things, but never really been seen for who I am.” (transgender 55yrs.)

Age Concern and Help The Aged in Scotland, together with Terrence Higgins Trust, acknowledge the valuable contribution made by members of Highland Rainbow Folk in the production of this booklet.

