



25

ways to be older LGB&T friendly

how to create a welcoming environment for older lesbian, gay, bisexual & trans people



Peter Tarcher

I welcome the publication of this ground-breaking booklet '25 ways to be older LGB&T friendly'. It points the way to best practice for service providers and for the upliftment and empowerment of LGB&T senior citizens. Bravo!

Getting older is part of life. For some people retirement can be a time of liberation, and the opening of new opportunities. Free from work responsibilities and, if they have children, free from child care, many older people can enjoy new hobbies, travel, voluntary work and educational pursuits.

However, old age can also be a time of worry and loss. Bereavements, financial worries and the need for additional support to do what used to be simple daily tasks can cause great distress.

Moreover, if people also face concerns about how they - or their partners, friends and family - will be treated when accessing services, it can discourage them from contacting vital agencies for help and support thereby diminishing opportunities and quality of later life.

It is vitally important that service providers are aware of the specific issues that older lesbian, gay, bisexual & trans people face, and that they act to ensure that their service is welcoming and meets the needs of all, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

This booklet provides invaluable pointers on ways to ensure that your service meets the needs of older lesbian, gay, bisexual & trans people. It gives the contact details of organisations in the region that can provide more information to support your work.

I commend '25 ways to be older LGB&T friendly'

We don't have any of them round here!

Not true! Contrary to this often heard statement, all providers of services will have service users (and workers) who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans. However, because population surveys do not ask about sexual orientation in the way they ask about gender and ethnicity we have to base our information on estimates. There are some powerful statistics which challenge the above statement. Government estimates give the numbers of lesbian, gay and bisexual people as being between 5% and 7% of the general population. Using these figures we can estimate that every fifteenth potential user of a service for older people is lesbian, gay or bisexual. In the case of trans people the latest estimate is a prevalence of 1,000 per 100,000 or 1%.

What's so special about these older people that we should view them differently?

Quite a few things make ageing as an older lesbian, gay man, bisexual or trans person even more challenging than it is for the general population. Among these are that:

- 80% age as single people, without a life partner or 'significant other' (compared to less than 40% in the general older population);
- Up to 75% live alone (compared with 33% of the general older population);
- 90% have no children (compared to less than 20% in the general older population);
- They are more likely to smoke and drink than average so have an increased risk of coronary heart disease, cancer and alcohol related illnesses.

As a result of these circumstances older lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people are more likely to need care services. In fact, they are five times less likely to use services than the general population.

This leaflet gives 25 ways an organisation can adapt to make their services user friendly to older lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people and thus help these vulnerable groups of older people to access the services they need.

Your policies

It is an organisational matter to be older lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans friendly. Start at the core of your organisation with your policies:

- 1** Make sure that your Equality and Diversity Policy and statement are up to date, published and accessible.
- 2** Your safeguarding policies should explicitly refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans issues such as harassment, homophobia and transphobia.
- 3** Confidentiality is extremely important to older lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people. An explicit assurance of confidentiality to an older person can help them to be honest about their needs and access appropriate services. Make sure your Confidentiality Policy is robust, complied with and that people are aware of it. 'Outing' a trans person with a Gender Recognition Certificate by using information gained in your official capacity and without their permission could result in a £1,000 fine according to the terms of the Gender Recognition Act, 2004. Not all trans people will have a Gender Recognition Certificate but it is good practice to apply the same principles to all.

Your environment

The environment you work in can indicate to older lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people that your organisation is LGB&T friendly and that they can feel confident to approach you and raise their issues and concerns with you. To give these signals you can:

4 Display appropriate images such as pictures of same sex couples, trans positive images and the rainbow flag. Display posters and information for LGB&T support groups.

5 Display a visible non-discrimination statement such as 'Our organisation provides equality of services and care to everyone, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, race, age, faith or disability' (The Equity Partnership).

6 Have information on display which makes it clear that you are able to help older lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. For example, publications such as 'Later life as an older lesbian, gay or bisexual person' and 'Transgender issues in later life' published by Age UK.

7 Use terms such as 'older lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people' where appropriate in your literature.

Your staff

8 When recruiting staff include an assessment of candidates' attitudes around equality issues including to older lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans.

9 Newly recruited staff should sign an equalities statement which makes explicit reference to supporting older lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people, among all the other strands.

10 Managers need to give very clear and consistent messages about expectations on equality and provide opportunities for discussion in team meetings, supervision and appraisal.

11 Lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans staff who are 'out' are valuable role models and can help provide the confidence for older people to come out themselves and be honest about their needs and expectations.

12 When recruiting staff and volunteers advertise your vacancies in the lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans press.

Your training

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Provide training for all staff and volunteers on equality issues with specific reference to those which apply to lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people. This will help to highlight prejudice and ignorance, provide a clear message that discrimination is unacceptable and provide information and develop their skills.

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Other training can help staff and volunteers to have the confidence to challenge inappropriate comments and behaviour.

15

Keep information about local, regional and national lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans groups and organisations up to date and accessible to staff so that they are able to make appropriate referrals and pass on suitable information.

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There are some specialist organisations which provide training / awareness raising sessions looking at the needs of older lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people. Details of these are included at the end of this booklet.

Your language

The use of inappropriate language can be the greatest barrier to older lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people feeling they can come out and tell you what they really need. Training should be given to focus on this. Some of the most common problems are based upon making assumptions.

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Avoid questions that assume that someone is heterosexual. Make sure that your language is gender neutral e.g. use 'partner' instead of 'spouse'.

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Do not assume that someone's partner is of the opposite sex or that all women are 'Mrs'.

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Rather than asking about marital status ask who the person's significant relationships are with / have been with.

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Listen to how a person describes their own identity, partnerships and relationships and take your lead from them in the language you choose.

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The term 'next of kin' can be interpreted differently by older lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people. They may no longer be in touch with children or other family but may have a 'family of choice' made up from friends of many years including their partner. They will be far better placed to know what someone's wishes are than a relative they have not seen for years and with whom they may not have been on good terms.

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Be careful about using terms such as 'dyke', 'fag', 'queer' or 'tranny'. Some gay people may use these but it is not appropriate for your organisation to do so. Neither is the word 'homosexual' acceptable because of the negative connotations. Most people are happy with lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans. If in doubt, ask.

Working with trans people

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There are particular issues to take into account when you are working with trans people:

- Do not comment on a trans person's appearance or 'passability' unless they ask for your opinion.
- Don't use terms like disorder (e.g. gender disorder) or choice. People who are transitioning are bringing their biological sex in line with their gender identity.
- Trans people can be heterosexual, lesbian, gay bisexual or asexual – don't make assumptions about sexual orientation or sexuality.
- Do not refer to someone as pre-op or post-op because that defines genitalia.
- Do not make assumptions about gender, ask how a trans person wishes to be addressed.

Your monitoring

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Monitoring sexual orientation and gender identity within your staff teams and your client group is essential; it will help you to understand their needs and to design appropriate services and support. In addition, over time, monitoring can be used as a way of measuring your progress. For statutory organisations, understanding the make up and the experiences of staff and client groups is also required as part of the Public Sector Equality Duty.

It is important to remember that monitoring within your organisation is not just a case of ticking boxes; monitoring needs to be done in a sensitive and appropriate manner and from a place of knowledge and awareness.

Not everyone will understand how or why this monitoring should be done. It is advised

that before monitoring sexual orientation and gender identity, staff should receive appropriate training on monitoring, and on the issues facing older LGB&T people.

Essential to a successful monitoring programme is ensuring that staff are comfortable being monitored themselves.

More information and guidance on monitoring can be accessed through the Stonewall and GIRES websites; locally, there may be groups that can facilitate staff training.

- Monitoring is essential and helps organisations to meet their legal obligations and provide appropriate services
- A sensitive approach with staff and clients crucial
- Training must be provided to any staff conducting LGB&T monitoring
- Understanding your client group's life experiences will help the process
- Staff should be comfortable with being monitored themselves

Your involvement of older lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people

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Not all older lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people are 'out' and they have to make a decision whether to be 'out' every time they are in a new situation. This can be several times a day. Do not, therefore, assume that they will always be prepared to identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans and speak about their issues.

Useful contacts

Local organisations in Bradford & District

The Equity Partnership

Plays an active role in supporting LGB&T communities in Bradford. We produce a free electronic news bulletin and organise a bi-monthly network for groups and individuals. Equity Partnership also organises one-off events on issues relevant to LGB&T communities. The Equity Centre offers a relaxed meeting space, a fully-equipped training resource and a venue for events, right in the centre of Bradford. The Centre is an ideal place for groups, meetings and training events. We provide training for agencies on LGB&T issues. The Centre is also available for hire - contact us for details.

01274 727759

admin@equitypartnership.org.uk

Yorkshire Mesmac

Works with gay and bisexual men and men who have sex with men, and the wider LGBT communities to offer support, information and resources. All sites across Yorkshire offer condoms and lubricant, counselling,

outreach services, training, groups, testing and one to one support.

For more information please visit www.mesmac.co.uk.

Helpline

London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard

Has information about local area support and help

0300 330 0630 (open daily 10am - 11pm)

www.llgs.org.uk

Hate Crime Reporting

Hate crime against LGB&T people can be reported in confidence by dialling 101 from any area or online by visiting:

https://secure.met.police.uk/hatecrime_national/index.php?rid=2946

Useful Publications

Pink News

Online LGB&T news

www.pinknews.co.uk

Gay Times

Monthly gay magazine
www.gaytimes.co.uk

Diva

monthly lesbian magazine
www.divamag.co.uk

Useful Websites & Contacts

Equity Partnership

Working with, and for, Bradford & District's LGB&T communities
www.equitypartnership.org.uk

Stonewall

National rights and campaigning group
www.stonewall.org.uk

Press for Change

The UK's leading experts in transgender law
www.pfc.org.uk

The Gender Trust

The largest registered charity helping trans people and all those affected by gender identity issues
www.gendertrust.org.uk

Gender Identity Research and Education Society

www.gires.org.uk
01372 801554

Stonewall Housing

Specialist lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) housing advice and support provider in England
Advice Line 020 7359 5767
www.stonewallhousing.org

National Older LGBT housing group (Stonewall Housing)

Tina Wathern - Older LGBT Housing Group Co-ordinator
07792 539813 (mobile)
Tina@StonewallHousing.org

Consortium of lesbian, gay, bisexual & transgendered voluntary and community organisations

A national membership organisation focusing on the development and support of LGB&T groups, projects and organisations; so they can deliver direct services and campaign for individual rights.
lgbtconsortium.org.uk

supported by:

The **co-operative** membership



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**Copies of this leaflet and other publications
can be obtained from the Equity Partnership.**

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