



Count us in!

Addressing the needs of Wales' forgotten
'community of interest'

A Stonewall Cymru Assessment Report, July 2004
Supported by the Lloyds TSB Foundation

Stonewall Cymru

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Foreword

A 'community of interest' is defined as a group of people connected by a common interest or characteristic rather than a geographical location. There exists in Wales just such a community, numbering as many as 200,000 and scattered all over Wales for whom properly funded service provision is virtually non-existent in many areas.

That significant minority is made up of Wales' lesbian, gay and bisexual people who form up to 7% of the population and suffer daily prejudice, isolation and harassment through no fault of their own.

Equality is coming of age in the UK. Within a few years, we will have a single commission on equality and human rights spanning age, disability, gender, race, religion and sexual orientation. The National Assembly for Wales is in the vanguard of modern best practice with its founding duty to have due regard to equality of opportunity for all people in the conduct of its business and the exercising of its functions.

Yet basic services and infrastructures for one equality strand (sexual orientation) lags behind the rest.

We recognise the commitment to equality shown by the Welsh Assembly Government in helping to establish Stonewall Cymru and by funding it as a consultation partner. It is because we are mandated to support the Assembly in developing policies and services that we have produced this document, which sets out clear recommendations on the way forward for building realistic and progressive lesbian, gay and bisexual provision in Wales.

The recommendations arise from a recent audit of existing services and a service needs assessment. This was made possible through a grant from the Lloyds TSB Foundation for England and Wales, to whom we extend our gratitude.

We hope it will be instrumental in highlighting a crucial and neglected part of the equality spectrum in Wales and gain lesbian, gay and bisexual people recognition as a disadvantaged community of interest in order to access the help they need.

Jenny Porter Community Development Officer

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Stonewall Cymru
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Background

The 'problem' for lesbian, gay and bisexual [LGB¹] people has always been, and remains, the homophobic discrimination they face in society. This can range from ignorance, discriminatory laws and ostracism to outright hostility, violence and random assault. Since the 1970s, lesbian, gay and bisexual people have organised themselves in groups across Wales to provide self help, peer support, information, and safe spaces to socialise. These voluntary services have been invaluable. Until recently, this entire sector had gone unnoticed by mainstream society, and unaccounted for as a service in need of resources and strategic planning.

There are currently 34 diverse groups providing services for lesbian, gay and bisexual people in Wales, 20 of them run by lesbian, gay and bisexual volunteers for lesbian, gay and bisexual people, and a further 14 supporting lesbian, gay and bisexual people while working for other specific target groups such as youth, trade unionists and homeless people.

Thirty years since the first support groups began to spring up across Wales, discrimination remains an abiding and

life-restricting factor in lesbian, gay and bisexual people's lives. Stonewall Cymru's Wales-wide survey (Counted Out, 2003) revealed that, for example, 35% of respondents reported being the victim of physical violence; 25% reported having been dismissed from a job because of their sexuality and 20% reported concealing their sexual identity at work.

In most parts of Wales, a person 'coming out' still risks rejection from family and friends, discrimination, abuse and even physical violence. Thousands (understandably) still choose to hide their sexual orientation, and are vulnerable to isolation, lack of confidence, under performance and self-harm as a result. This is the background to the continuing need for local lesbian, gay and bisexual support groups.

Anecdotally, it has long been known just how far such groups lag behind other self-help networks in terms of funding, resources and organisational support. Last year, a grant from the Lloyds TSB Foundation for England and Wales meant Stonewall Cymru was finally in a position to accurately assess the status

quo by collecting data from both service providers and service users. At the same time, a detailed needs evaluation was conducted. The recommendations set out below arise directly from the findings of this research.

Stonewall Cymru

Stonewall Cymru is the only all Wales organisation working individually and in partnership with other agencies, organisations, statutory bodies and individuals to:

- Promote the human rights and equal treatment of lesbian, gay and bisexual people
- Challenge discrimination against lesbian, gay and bisexual people
- Articulate the needs and interests of lesbian, gay and bisexual people and represent these to the National Assembly for Wales and other appropriate bodies
- Consolidate and develop the infrastructure with lesbian, gay and bisexual communities across Wales to enable them to contribute to and have representation in policy developments

"This entire sector had gone unnoticed and unaccounted for by mainstream society"



Key Recommendations

1 That lesbian, gay and bisexual people be recognised as an eligible 'community of interest' in funding schemes and social inclusion programmes such as Communities First.

Give specific consideration to mainstreaming lesbian, gay and bisexual equality and look at how funding can support equality and diversity outcomes in order to increase the inclusion of socially marginalised people.

2 That homophobia be challenged in society to make Wales a safer place for lesbian, gay and bisexual people to live free from harassment, discrimination, bullying or hate crime and the fear of these: in education, in the work place, and in their daily lives.

3 That regional lesbian, gay and bisexual fora be developed and supported, in line with similar minority networks across the equality and voluntary sector.

Such a forum will bring this part of the voluntary sector out of the closet and aid communication for both local community

strategy partnerships to access the voice of lesbian, gay and bisexual people, and enable the local lesbian, gay and bisexual community to centralise information and best practice knowledge as well network across the regions.

4 That training and development provision be put in place to boost governance and quality of service in the lesbian, gay and bisexual voluntary sector.

5 That widespread public information be made available on how to contact local lesbian, gay and bisexual groups.

It could be estimated that less than 3% of lesbian, gay and bisexual people in Wales are currently accessing the lesbian, gay and bisexual services, this could be from lack of access to information. Fear of being 'outed' locally and social discrimination has all too often prevented the groups themselves from approaching the tradition information points [libraries, CAB etc] to publicise the services, and lesbian, gay and bisexual people from finding the information, for too long this has been a secret service.

6 That an all-Wales, 24/7 lesbian, gay and bisexual peer support helpline be established. Such a helpline should provide peer support for people in difficulties due to their sexual orientation, be easily accessible and run by lesbian, gay and bisexual people.

7 That further groups be established across Wales to address the needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual parents and their children, and people who are younger, older, disabled, in difficulty with addiction, mental health users, Welsh speakers for whom their sexual orientation is the defining factor in their exclusion and disadvantage.

8 That awareness training on recognising and responding to the specific needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual people be made widely available to service providers. Public and private sectors need to be able to recognize and respond to the specific needs of a lesbian, gay and bisexual person in all circumstances and seek to open paths of greater engagement, consultation and representation for lesbian, gay and bisexual people.

“Align social inclusion programmes to recognise lesbian, gay and bisexual people as a community of interest”

The cornerstones of LGB infrastructure

Stonewall Cymru has produced the following list of essentials to address the key recommendations and achieve outcomes of increased quality of life and increased empowerment for lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Stonewall Cymru will work in partnership with the lesbian, gay and bisexual community to develop these cornerstones as capacity and access to funding progresses.

Access to funding for lesbian, gay and bisexual groups: Work with the Wales Assembly Government and funding agencies to align social inclusion programmes to recognise lesbian, gay and bisexual people as a community of interest and funding objectives to encompass equality outcomes. Opening up these funding streams will have a profoundly beneficial effect on every aspect of lesbian, gay and bisexual provision in Wales.

Support networks for lesbian, gay and bisexual people: Work with lesbian, gay and bisexual groups, individuals and existing informal networks to establish at least three regional fora. Each forum

will aid communication, thus reducing isolation, increasing support, centralising information and providing the basis for co-ordination within a region, and with other regional fora.

Safe, non-discriminatory access to all services for lesbian, gay and bisexual people: Establish paths of consultation and representation for lesbian, gay and bisexual people with local policy-makers. Hold a conference for non-lesbian, gay and bisexual voluntary organisations and policy makers on lesbian, gay and bisexual issues and needs with training workshops. Enable greater engagement with local policy agendas, assessment and strategic planning of lesbian, gay and bisexual service provision across the region.

Robust support services for lesbian, gay and bisexual groups: Facilitate access to tools for governance, fund-raising and best practice and programmes of training, and support the development of a code of practice for lesbian, gay and bisexual service provision.





Main findings

Funding

36% of groups reported no annual income and a further 36% operated on less than £1,000 income. 50% had received 'start up' funding but were not receiving anything towards sustainability. Lesbian, gay and bisexual groups are extremely poorly resourced compared to most other areas of the voluntary sector. Lesbian, gay and bisexual groups report a reluctance to access local government support for fear of being 'outed' locally or harassed in some way.

There are few funding streams that attract applications from lesbian, gay and bisexual groups. Many funding sources focus on education and employment - inappropriate for groups providing peer support to lesbian, gay and bisexual people, whose problems arise from difficulties related to society's response to their sexual orientation.

Current social inclusion funding has started to recognise that geographically based schemes can miss the communities of people that are held together by a common interest. But in Wales these funding streams have omitted lesbian, gay and bisexual people as a community

of interest. People who are unlikely to congregate in one geographical area for fear of discrimination and will travel great distances to call on unfunded or poorly funded peer groups to gain support and guidance. This omission of access to social inclusion funding is detrimental to lesbian, gay and bisexual people.

Lesbian, gay and bisexual people are not a homogenous group of course. Lesbian, gay and bisexual people exist in other groups that do attract funding, for example the young and black, minority and ethnic people. However the fear of homophobia will often act as a barrier to presenting the specific problems of sexual orientation exclusion. The experiences of social exclusion on the basis of sexual orientation will often remain invisible and unaddressed in funding programmes.²

Consequences of low funding

Lack of funding and poor capacity leads to a concentration on front-line services at the detriment of governance with little accounting for the work done which, in its turn, leads to an inability to make funding applications. 72% of the sample groups were entirely dependent on volunteers and as the function of the

"36% of groups reported no annual income and a further 36% operated on less than £1,000 income"



Main findings, continued

group was peer support these volunteers would be expected to be lesbian, gay and bisexual themselves, this can create recruiting and governance problems. Only 36% of groups reported having constitutions and AGMs with a further 36% pending.

Nature of groups

Existing lesbian, gay and bisexual groups essentially offer peer group support: lesbian, gay or bisexual people offering the friendship and help of someone in the same situation and experiencing similar issues. These groups provide access to meetings and social events to address the feelings of isolation and difficulties associated with 'coming out' and dealing with discriminatory social attitudes. The essential principles and functions of these groups are similar to other peer group organisations, such as Gingerbread, the support organisation for lone parent families. 50% of responding groups had been in existence for over 10 years.

Isolation of groups

65% of lesbian, gay and bisexual groups work autonomously and may work away from influences both from the

voluntary sector and the lesbian, gay and bisexual community. This isolation can be further increased for specialist groups [e.g.: lesbian only groups] by their need to maintain service boundaries. There are currently no established systems of communication and sharing of information and best practice knowledge between groups by either region or speciality. Often the only contact between different group representatives would be at gay club venues, or events organised by outside agencies.

It is estimated that as few as 3% of people who identify themselves as lesbian, gay and bisexual are currently accessing services. Groups reported a higher number of lesbians than gay men using their services.

Helplines:

Although helplines are the most used gateway to information on lesbian, gay and bisexual services there is neither an all-Wales lesbian, gay and bisexual helpline nor a system of co-ordination between the local lesbian, gay and bisexual helplines. Opening hours are limited by the availability of local lesbian, gay and bisexual volunteers to run them.

“These groups offer the friendship of someone experiencing the same issues, in a similar way to other peer group organisations such as Gingerbread”

Assessment methodology

The assessment process involved two parts: a mapping of the services currently provided by lesbian, gay and bisexual groups and community consultation on service provision for lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Stonewall Cymru currently works in partnership with transgender and transsexual people in Wales who also suffer from prejudice and harassment but whose issues are gender reassignment and who may or may not have same sex sexual orientation.

Mapping exercise

We contacted the 34 groups in Wales known to be providing services for lesbian, gay and bisexual people. 20 of these groups provided services specifically by lesbian, gay and bisexual volunteers for lesbian, gay and bisexual people, and a further 14 organisations also supported lesbian, gay and bisexual people while working for other specific target groups such as youth in general, union members and homeless people. A questionnaire was sent to these 34 groups, 14 were returned - a 41% return rate.

Community consultation

With funding from the Lloyds TSB

Foundation of England and Wales, Stonewall Cymru undertook four regional (North, Mid, South-West and South-East Wales) mapping workshops, and a further workshop to look at lesbian, gay and bisexual helpline service provision across Wales. The 600 members of Stonewall Cymru, and members of the local lesbian, gay and bisexual groups, were invited to attend a workshop in their region. All participants identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual, except for two members of FFLAG.³

We employed independent facilitators to carry out the consultation sessions to help ensure an objective process. Participants completed questionnaires before the workshop and a feedback form at the end. In total 125 people participated including representatives from 15 of the lesbian, gay and bisexual organisations in Wales.

Footnotes

- 1 The acronym LGB is often used for lesbian, gay and bisexual
- 2 The term 'social exclusion' describes marginalisation from one or more of the following: employment, income, social networks such as family, neighbourhood and community, decision making and from an adequate quality of life.
- 3 Friends & Family of Lesbian and Gay People