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From outside to inside

How housing services can
meet the needs of lesbian,
gay and bisexual people

Stonewall Cymru and Triangle Wales have managed a research project funded by the Welsh Assembly Government, which considered how well housing services and providers respond to the needs of their lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) clients, and how sometimes homophobia can result in housing crisis.

The full report of the research, entitled *The housing needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual people in Wales*, and an executive summary are available from Triangle Wales.

This is a summary of LGB service requirements and how you can adapt your services to meet them.

Nowhere to go

Research in Wales has confirmed that lesbian gay and bisexual people (LGB) can find themselves vulnerable, homeless or in housing crisis because:

- ★ Across all tenures, adults' experience of verbal and physical homophobic abuse from neighbours is that it escalates, and that there is no effective intervention. The only way out is to move away;
- ★ On 'coming out' young people may be ejected from the family home or the parental relationship may break down in other ways;
- ★ They can become a target for abuse or attack by family members;
- ★ They can experience discrimination when accessing housing and support services, from other service users and/or staff.

Some young people who 'came out' and were then 'thrown out' by parents tried to seek help from local authority housing departments or housing associations.

In the ensuing interview, which often took place in a public office, they were afraid of disclosing the reason behind the breakdown of the family relationship. They were not confident to ask for the service they needed - that is to be housed somewhere that does not tolerate homophobic attitudes or abuse.

If unable to explain the reasons behind their housing needs, LGB people risked being told by housing providers that they had 'made themselves intentionally homeless'. Access to services was closed down.

The research found that adults in all tenures had experienced housing crisis when targeted for homophobic abuse by neighbours or youths from within the immediate community. In many cases the harassment affected their whole lives - education, jobs, family and relationships, and emotional health.

Perpetrators of abuse were rarely effectively dealt with. LGB people felt the only thing they could do was to move house. This extreme action is not desirable or possible for all home owners, tenants, students, or house mates.

The research discovered that service providers in Wales do not routinely reach out LGB communities to tell them how their services can meet their needs. Certainly there should be a co-ordinated multi-agency approach to protection from homophobic attack in our communities.

Where can they go? How can your service serve them?

From outside to inside

'We don't need to know that'

Often representatives from housing associations, registered social landlords and local authorities told the researchers that their service was for all people, 'we don't discriminate' they said. Sometimes, if LGB people disclosed their sexual orientation when explaining the problem, service providers said; 'but we don't need to know that – we treat everyone the same'. But rather like your gender, or disability, or ethnicity or age or religion, sexual orientation might be relevant to the service you need.

As service users we all know that it's the first person we meet, often a gatekeeper, who influences our impression of the whole service. Lesbian, gay and bisexual people have to assess each new person to decide whether to invest their trust in them by disclosing the full circumstances relevant to their needs. They will be deciding, in each new encounter with staff, whether they feel secure to 'come out' and tell the full story - without knowing what reaction they'll receive.

Service providers must take seriously causes of housing crisis when a client's sexual orientation may be relevant to the change in circumstance and inform how, what, and where housing and support services are directed, for example sensitive allocations policies, provision of nearby peer support or by providing an environment in which they can give you the full story if they want to.

In the research, we also heard from housing service providers who were already beginning to consider how sexual-orientation might be relevant to their client groups or service users, and how policies and practices could change to meet actual service delivery needs.

Service providers wanted to know more about making changes.

Simple Solutions

- ★ Ensure policies, practices and service delivery outcomes are audited to comply with housing legislation and WAG guidance, and legislative changes in civil partnerships, employment, and goods and services
- ★ Train your staff on how to understand LGB service delivery needs and how to address them
- ★ Make sure lesbian, gay and bisexual communities in your area know that your service is for them
- ★ Put up posters in public areas
- ★ Organise focus group research locally – it is likely that you do have LGB service users but no-one has yet asked them for their insights about the service and how it could be improved
- ★ Run a focus group for your LGB staff - they will have insights on how to reach out and how to improve your services
- ★ Make links and ensure referrals to specialist LGB service providers
- ★ With this new knowledge - create a policy on sexual orientation for staff and service users/customers/clients. Promote it widely and commit to tackling homophobia throughout the organisation
- ★ Include a sensitive allocations policy so that you know landlords, managers and other tenants will make lesbian, gay and bisexual people feel welcome and quickly address homophobia/heterosexism
- ★ Ensure contract compliance with your policy on sexual orientation
- ★ Monitor to find out if you've got it right, not just to see if you have LGB service users. In all likelihood you do, and more will be encouraged to come if they hear that you have taken these steps.

From outside to inside

This leaflet draws upon research undertaken for the Welsh Assembly Government between 2003 - 2005, managed by a steering group which included Triangle Wales and Stonewall Cymru. Reports and executive summaries of the full report, entitled *The Housing Needs of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People in Wales* (2005) are available from Triangle Wales.

Further reading:

- ★ Cull, M., Platzer, H. and Balloch, S. (2006) *Out On My Own: Understanding the Experiences and Needs of Homeless Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth*, University of Brighton, Health and Social Policy Research Centre
- ★ Gold, D. (2005) *Sexual exclusion: issues and best practice in lesbian, gay and bisexual housing and homelessness*. Shelter
- ★ O'Connor, W. and Molloy, D. (2001) *Hidden in Plain Sight': Homelessness amongst Lesbian and Gay Youth*. National Centre for Social Research.

LGB housing/support related service contacts in Wales:

★ Housing

Triangle Wales 0808 8010306

Housing advice and support for LGBT people of all ages, Wales wide

★ LGBT Youth Resources:

SYGNET 01792 477540 Swansea based youth group

W.A.T.S 07789 371564 Caerphilly based youth group

VIVA LGB Service 01745 351293 Rhyl based youth group

★ Domestic Abuse

The Dyn Project 02920 226622

For men who have experienced domestic abuse

The Women's Safety Unit 02920 222022

For women who have experienced domestic abuse

★ South Wales Police Minorities Support Unit

0800 587 8973

or ask for the Diversity Officer within your police force area

See the **Stonewall Cymru** website 'Across Wales' section for full LGB listings by region **www.stonewallcymru.org.uk**

Stonewall Cymru 02920 237744