

Inclusivity without the cost



gentoo

 **Stonewall**
Acceptance without exception



Stonewall is here to let all lesbian, gay, bi and trans people know they're not alone. Our work with employers and service providers is integral to this mission. Organisations working in communities across the UK can have an enormous impact on the well-being of their LGBT employees and customers. They can also play an important role in raising awareness of LGBT issues within the wider population.

Gentoo has been a partner to Stonewall for many years and have a well-established commitment to LGBT equality. They have been consistently recognised in our annual ranking of employers, the Stonewall Top 100. Following three years in the Top 10 of this highly competitive list, we recognised Gentoo as a Stonewall Star Performer. This exclusive accolade celebrates the very best employers for LGBT people.

Each year, we challenge our Star Performers to find new and innovative ways to advance LGBT equality. This year, we asked each of them to share what they have learned, in the form of a best-practice guide on a topic where they have shown significant progress.

Gentoo, as one of the largest employers in Sunderland and landlords in the North East, recognise the opportunity they have to advance equality and inclusion across the region. They are an example of an organisation who have found creative ways to have a big impact and are a valuable example to others. We welcome this guide and hope that it inspires employers and service providers to do more to champion equality.

We invite you to join with us, and with Gentoo, in working towards acceptance without exception for LGBT people everywhere.

Ruth Hunt

Chief Executive, Stonewall



Our vision at Gentoo is about building strong communities and inspiring people. We fundamentally believe that inclusive communities are stronger and that our staff can be more inspired in a workplace that enables them to be themselves.

Gentoo is a member of Stonewall's Diversity Champions Programme and since joining in 2006 we have participated in the Workplace Equality Index. Our ranking has improved year on year and in 2014 we reached the number one position, being named in the top 100 gay-friendly employers. We are now very proud to be a Stonewall Star Performer.

Whilst these accolades are fantastic they are only just the icing on the cake, and of even more significance are the workplace improvements we have made during our journey to becoming an inclusive employer. Our staff sexual orientation declaration rates have risen from 67% in 2006 to 99%, our engagement and satisfaction rates among our LGBT colleagues are higher than other staff and we have successfully recruited a number of senior staff who have explicitly referred to our LGBT inclusivity commitment as their reason for wanting to work at Gentoo.

More recently we have taken our experience in creating an inclusive workplace into the communities in which we work and through a number of initiatives we have successfully engaged our LGBT customers. As a result of this engagement we have made improvements to the services we deliver and to the inclusivity of the communities in which we work.

Without doubt there have been hiccups along the way, but what we have learnt throughout this journey is that to empower people to be the best they can be needs some genuine passion and commitment. I would like to thank all of our staff, past and present, who have taken us so far on our journey.

Much done, more to do.

John Craggs

Chief Executive Officer, Gentoo

About Gentoo

Gentoo is a housing association that owns and manages more than 29,000 homes across the North East of England. We believe that by putting people first we can build great homes and create strong communities. We are focused on delivering an outstanding service to our customers and as a responsible business we pride ourselves on inspiring people to make a difference.

We collaborate with key partners and other housing associations to influence things that affect our colleagues, customers and society. We are one of the largest employers in Sunderland employing more than 1200 people.

Our vision:

- **Great Homes**
- **Strong Communities**
- **Inspired People**

Key

Throughout this document you will find real examples of low cost inclusion initiatives. We have used the following key to denote the approximate financial outlay.

£ - up to £100

££ - up to £500

£££ - over £500



Introduction

Gentoo has been working with Stonewall to improve Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) inclusivity since 2006. We have learnt a lot during our journey, recognising that inclusivity doesn't have to cost a lot. Our experience has highlighted that it's not about having a big diversity budget, it's about passionate and inspired people working together to make a positive difference. In an environment of limited budgets, innovation and creativity has been a critical success factor. As the saying goes, necessity really is the mother of invention.

This guide covers our top tips and real examples on how to engage and empower your staff and customers to embed an inclusive culture throughout your organisation and within the communities in which you work. There is a chapter covering each of the following subject areas:

- **Why diversity and inclusion matters** - This is about demonstrating why diversity matters in your organisation, the importance of leadership and ownership from a corporate perspective.
- **Engaging your staff** - This is about getting the hooks right for different people who are carrying out diverse roles within your organisation and how your staff can be your greatest asset; using real stories about real people.
- **Engaging your customers** - This is about the value of spreading your messages to a wider audience and how your customers can add real benefit.
- **Making it real** - This is about the authenticity of what you are doing and making your commitment to LGBT inclusion an ongoing thing, not simply an annual 'diversity month' commitment or one-off initiative.
- **Top tips** - Our five top tips on how to increase inclusivity without spending a lot!

Why diversity and inclusion matters

An organisation's commitment to inclusion needs to be clearly articulated to staff. They need to know why this matters to be able to understand what it means for them at work. A clearly articulated corporate and leadership message puts diversity and inclusion high up on the agenda. It sets the tone, and as a consequence the behaviours and attitude expected from all staff.

Linking LGBT inclusion into your values

Start with your corporate values. Using your values as a foundation gives you the language to build on and the ability to hold people accountable. If your commitment isn't rooted in your values then it can feel like a bolt-on for staff.

Our values:

- **Do the right thing**
- **Make a difference**
- **Work together**
- **Keep learning**
- **Give all you've got**

Our values encourage employees to do the right thing and to make a positive difference through working together, with a focus on continuous learning and 'giving all you've got'. We have successfully translated this corporate language into a diversity commitment in which 'giving all you've got' is about bringing your whole self to work based on the premise that people perform better when they can be themselves.

To demonstrate our corporate commitment we created a bespoke logo which would be recognised across the organisation, clearly showing that diversity really matters to us.



Creating a diversity logo



Why?

We wanted a visual tool for our internal and external communications to use on our letterhead, our email signatures and the documents we produce.

What we did:

Instead of employing a marketing company we created a staff and customer competition to design a bespoke logo. We advertised online and offline to staff and customers and we had a great response. The winning logo was designed by a member of staff and has been used ever since.

Impact:

The logo was bought into by both staff and customers through a competitive design process. This meant that there were no advertising agency charges and because we involved staff, they really bought into the concept.



Visible leadership

The value of strong, visible leadership and Board level commitment cannot be underestimated. There are lots of ways that an organisation can show this high level commitment, however knowing how to get initial buy-in can be difficult.

In 2007, our initial approach was to provide our Board and Senior Leadership Team with information about sexual orientation as part of a new Diversity Strategy that we were developing. The information we shared prompted a number of questions and highlighted a need for specific training.

We delivered a number of training and information sessions and knew these had been successful when the Chair of our Board contacted our Diversity Team. He explained that he had been talking to a fellow Board Chair who had dismissed the need for Equality and Diversity in a tough economic climate. Our Chairman took great delight in pointing out to the fellow Chair that this was exactly the time when diversity should absolutely be at the top of any Board agenda. In a difficult climate, enabling people to be themselves will ensure the best and most productive outcomes.

Since then we have included our Leadership Team and Board in a number of initiatives. One example is the **#NoBystanders** pledge. **#NoBystanders** is the Stonewall campaign to stand up to hate and abuse. The aim of the campaign is to empower others to challenge all forms of hateful language and abuse when they can, spreading the message. Gentoo tailored and adopted this pledge, meaning we didn't have to reinvent the wheel while creating something bespoke that worked for Gentoo.

For more information about the pledge visit www.stonewall.org.uk/our-work/campaigns/nobystanders



Gentoo #NoBystanders pledge:



Why?

We were keen to support this national Stonewall campaign. The **#NoBystanders** pledge is aligned to Gentoo's values and to gain traction in our organisation we decided to tailor it to our organisational priorities.

What we did:

We already had a commitment to operate with an 'eyes wide open approach' so we adopted the pledge adding eyes and a mouth to indicate keeping your eyes open and speaking out.

Impact:

The alignment to existing priorities worked and we saw staff post their signed pledges on online platforms, sharing videos of themselves 'signing-up' and printing off signed copies of pledges to put on their office walls/desks. There was a high level of engagement and the message quickly spread across our organisation.

Engaging your staff

Effective staff engagement is all about finding different, innovative and creative ways to capture attention and make diversity real and relevant. Staff are your greatest asset. Harness the talents of your most innovative and engaged staff to help you to achieve LGBT inclusion.

Tailoring your message

Whilst a clearly articulated corporate message will set the tone, our experience has been that some staff in different parts of the business need to have clearer messages about why LGBT inclusion matters. Messages relevant to the distinct roles they carry out are the hooks we used.

By articulating a number of reasons why this agenda matters to us and using real examples, we have been able to highlight to different parts of our business why this should matter to them.

For example, our HR team really 'got it' when a new recruit to a leadership role specifically mentioned that it had been our visible commitment to LGBT inclusion that had attracted them to apply for the job.

Our front-line staff understood it when we used work based scenarios such as the reporting of homophobic hate-crime and dealing with tenancy issues (i.e. succession in same sex relationships).

Capturing attention

It can sometimes be tricky to get staff engaged. There are a number of barriers including fear of 'outing' LGBT staff, getting line manager agreement and negative comments from peers. The way Gentoo overcame these potential issues was to create a very inclusive and attractive first 'hook' which we promoted widely across the organisation using our weekly staff newsletter and internal poster campaign. The first 'hook' was to create a Diversity Champions Programme – encouraging staff to be allies and role-models for workplace inclusion. We encouraged staff to attend by launching with a 'Diversitea Party'.



Why not have a 'Diversitea Party'?



Why?

It doesn't have to be complicated or cost a lot, by having a tea party we could attract a wider interest in diversity.

What we did:

We provided tea, cakes and the space/time for staff from across the organisation to meet and chat in a relaxed atmosphere. We also dedicated a space in the venue for each of the diversity strands. In these spaces we had information and games. Staff from the various network groups also chatted to their peers. Providing this open space meant that LGBT Staff Network Group members who were less confident about being 'out' at work could attend without aligning themselves to the LGBT space if they wished.

Impact:

We received great feedback and followed up the event with further staff communication which resulted in further recruitment not only to the Diversity Champions Programme but also to our LGBT Staff Network Group.

Word of warning:

don't forget the small stuff!

Of course it will only feel authentic for staff if it's part of the whole architecture. An early lesson for Gentoo was about our firewall. We hadn't updated our acceptable language and phrases before embarking on our journey to sexual orientation inclusion, so words like 'gay' were not permitted. It wasn't a good start when trying to establish a network group when all references to sexuality were blocked.

What we did:

Carried out a thorough review of the firewall.

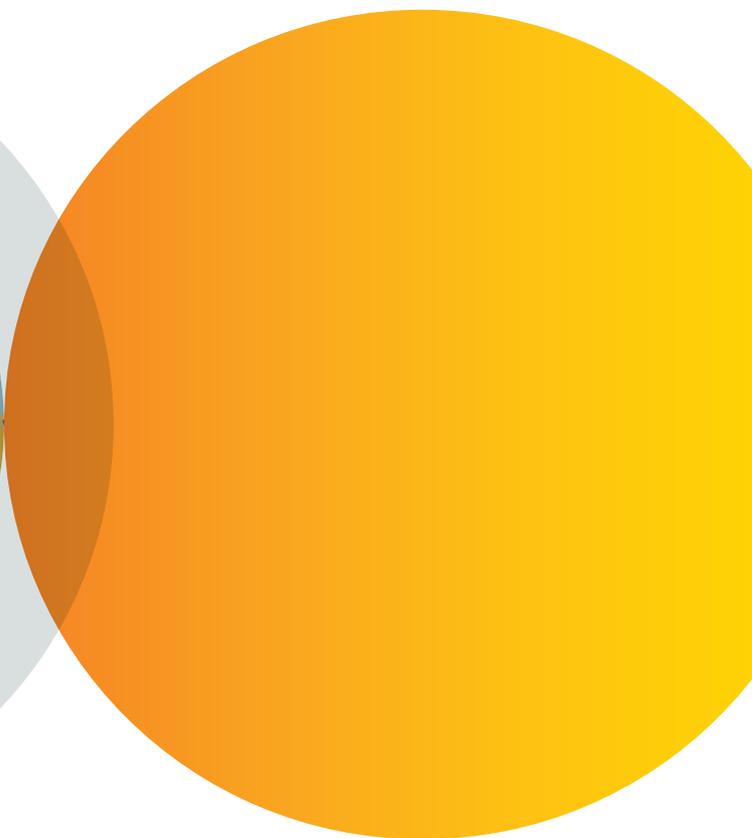


Being creative

One of the ways we have captured attention and made diversity engaging and fun for staff has been through our use of games in training sessions. We haven't paid for external providers to create and deliver this, instead we encouraged our staff to be creative.

An example we have used in the past is Snakes and Ladders. Snakes and Ladders is an original game of morality invented in the Victorian era and was perfect for adaption. We developed negative and positive diversity scenarios for each snake and ladder respectively. This enabled us to have conversations about each topic as the game was played. For example, one of the negative

scenarios was about a transgender customer asking to change the name on their tenancy agreement, they were told that a passport was required as proof of identification, which wasn't true. One of the positive scenarios was about homophobic graffiti being removed from a fence within 24 hours.



Creating engaging games for staff training



Why?

The benefits of designing our own training was that we could create something that was relevant for our organisation. It was easy to adapt and change without significant cost, and enabled us to encourage staff to get involved and be creative in the design process.

What we did:

We designed and created a large floor size version and individual smaller sized games. We have played the game in a number of ways depending on the size of group. We have used the smaller individual games as a 'take-home' game to encourage families to play and discuss the issues it raises.

Impact:

Staff took the small-bag size games home and they played it with their families, we received positive feedback and LGBT inclusion messages were shared more widely, rather than solely with our staff network.

Making it personal

Making it personal is about authenticity, using real stories from real people who work for you to demonstrate your organisation's commitment.

Encourage your staff to share their stories, from celebrating civil partnerships and same sex adoption stories, to your staff's experiences of coming out. Real stories and photos can be shared using a variety of media at low cost, in staff newsletters, on your intranet and in customer publications.

Real stories can also be used during training. We have found that a message is much more persuasive when your staff can see that it's about their colleagues.

At Gentoo we decided to create diversity training for managers. As part of our preparatory work we carried out a consultation exercise with our Diversity Champions and Network Group members, asking them to share their experiences (good and bad) of managers dealing with diversity issues.

The stories we collected were so powerful that we decided that we should do more with them, rather than simply use them as examples within a training course.

Using the stories we had collected from staff and building on the success of the **#NoBystanders** pledge we created a Diversity Manifesto for Gentoo. We made a video of the words which were spoken by other members of staff.

Using a video is an impactful and flexible resource and it means you can share it widely.

Creating a Diversity Manifesto



Why?

The stories we had collected were so powerful we wanted to share them as widely as possible. We felt that by creating a video we would have the greatest impact. It is also a flexible channel of communication, which could be used in a variety of ways.

What we did:

Staff volunteered to record their voices and words, this helped to keep the anonymity of contributors. We created a video that displayed the words in large font, with the audio running alongside it. This video was used in training session sessions and informal meetings, we also shared this via our YouTube account.

Impact:

The Diversity Manifesto created conversations. Even the most cynical couldn't disagree with the real stories from their peers and anecdotally we know that it encouraged more people to share their stories in the workplace with their colleagues.

Gentoo's Manifesto can be viewed by visiting our YouTube channel and typing in the words 'Value Difference'
(<https://youtube/v3n8mloq9ps>)

Network Groups

Setting up staff network groups is so important. These will look and feel very different in different organisations. It can be difficult to establish a sustained network in a small organisation so make links with other networks in your area, but don't assume that you will know what will work for your staff.

Keep it fluid and let it evolve, and don't underestimate the value of your allies. Straight allies are an incredibly valuable asset, so harness their support, particularly within small organisations.

Stonewall provide some great resources on establishing network groups which can be found by visiting www.stonewall.org.uk



Word of warning:

Don't make assumptions,
always consult.

Working in partnership with other relatively small organisations in the locality, we thought a 'virtual LGBT staff network' across the region would be the answer. The trouble was it was developed from an organisational perspective, as opposed to LGBT staff perspective. No in-depth consultation was carried out with the staff who we hoped would connect with it. As a result it just wasn't bought-into and we didn't get the engagement we had hoped for.

What we did:

Instead we held an informal evening networking event for LGBT staff and allies from all of the organisations. This was much more effective as people made real connections and friendships.

Engaging your customers

Your customers can add real value to the work you are doing and can spread a much wider LGBT inclusive message which can have a tangible and sustained impact on the wider community.

Customer engagement can happen at two levels. Engaging all of your customers in an inclusivity journey to create stronger, cohesive communities and also engagement specifically with your LGBT customers. The community-wide engagement is an easier first step on the road to LGBT specific engagement.

Community-wide engagement

As with your staff, it's important for your customers to know why this agenda matters to your organisation and to know what value it can bring to them and their communities. You need to find a way to articulate and communicate this message. This is about demonstrating/proving that you understand that there are specific issues and that you care as an organisation.

At Gentoo we have shared stories in our customer newsletters and online. We have had a visible presence at Pride events across the region, and working with our LGBT Staff Network Group we have developed an LGBT customer care service standard. This service standard, which is prominently advertised in all of our offices, provides LGBT customers with the opportunity to have an interview with a member of staff who is LGBT or who has experience of LGBT issues.



LGBT Specific Engagement

We have been asking our customers about their sexual orientation since 2007. Whilst this hasn't been without hiccups, (see page 21), starting the dialogue with our customers some time ago means we have had many years experience.

We are currently completing surveys with all of our customers which cover a range of subjects including sexual orientation. By gathering sexual orientation data we have been able to target consultation with our LGBT customers.

One example of the LGBT specific engagement we have carried out was some research with customers about what would make our sheltered and extra-care housing schemes feel LGBT friendly. As a result of this consultation we have improved our care plans, provided training for all scheme managers and developed an LGBT inclusive plaque which is displayed in our schemes.



If at first you don't succeed...

The first time we asked customers about their sexual orientation was in 2006. When the results came back we were astounded to see that 16.4% of respondents were bisexual. However, having asked some people what they thought bisexual meant, we soon realised that there had been a distinct lack of understanding.



What we did:

We realised that we needed to raise awareness and understanding with customers, so we wrote articles for our local newsletters.

Making it real

For staff and customers to believe that this really matters to an organisation it must feel authentic. Only having a visible presence once a year to coincide with LGBT history month wouldn't suggest that an organisation is truly committed.

Use every opportunity that arises to embed a common understanding, both with customers and staff. At Gentoo we use a variety of in-house communication channels to celebrate key events such as IDAHOBIT (International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia), BiVisibility Day and LGBT History Month. We also use online

forums to start conversations about LGBT issues and we have discovered that we get the most engagement when we can link these to topical news stories.

The architecture of your business also needs to be right for your commitment to feel authentic. Your policies must have a clear LGBT inclusion message, profile data for your staff and customers needs to be regularly analysed and reported to your Boards. Your internal systems of audit must also check that what you say you are doing is actually happening.



Top tips

Creating an LGBT inclusive workplace does not have to cost a lot of money. Get the key elements right, starting at the top of the organisation and use innovative ways to maintain momentum.

Gentoo top tips:

- Link LGBT inclusion into your values and corporate language
- Create leadership buy-in
- Using real stories creates a real difference
- Find the innovators in your organisation and encourage their involvement
- Embrace your mistakes - turn negatives into positives

For further information about our approach to LGBT inclusion, contact Lucy Malarkey on:

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