



LGBT and Friends Event

25th June 2015



Introduction

In December 2014, LGBT Health and Inclusion Project (LGBT HIP) hosted a roundtable discussion for LGBT and learning disabilities service providers, to explore support and challenges for LGBT people with learning disabilities.

Following the [full report](#) and [easy-read report](#), several organisations have acted on the recommendations. MindOut, LGBT Switchboard and RISE LGBT Domestic Abuse Service have produced easy-read service leaflets.

In response to a lack of spaces for LGBT people with learning disabilities to meet, LGBT HIP and Brighton and Hove Speak Out Advocacy organised an event for people with learning disabilities who identify as LGBT or who are exploring sexuality and identity. The event, called LGBT & Friends, took place at Community Base, Brighton on the 18th June 2015. The rest of this report details the LGBT & Friends event.

LGBT & Friends

The aims of the event were to introduce in an informal way this group to local support organisations, sexual health and community safety services that could provide information, advice, and support. Organisations were asked to make an accessible presentation and talk to individuals about their services as needed. It was also an opportunity to hear what the experiences and issues were for this group.

Participants: Thirteen applications were received, 3 women and 10 men. Nine people came to the event but one person was too anxious to come in. Six people came with support workers. Support workers came from the following organisations: Grace Eyre Active Lives, Mencap, Liveability Eastbourne, Tamarisk Housing, Arundel Care services, Aldingbourne Trust. Of the eight people who participated, two were women and six were men.

PART ONE: LGBT Groups Presentation

Including LGBT Switchboard and Brighton & Hove Speak Out, nine organisations were represented at the event. Other groups were MindOut, LGBT Community Safety Forum, Sussex Police, Community Safety Casework Team, Terrence Higgins Trust, Claude Nicol and Trans Alliance.

We received positive feedback from the organisations who attended the event.

“A very good event with lots of information that was useful for both service users and service providers”

“It was a brilliant morning, thank you for organising it. It would be good to continue to work together in this area.”

On the day, some workers identified key areas that they could develop in their own work. A worker from Terrence Higgins Trust felt work was needed to support gay men with learning disabilities around sexual consent.

The Claude Nicol Centre explained their services had changed and they are now offering Sexual health services and contraception at Morley Street and Claude Nicol and their new service is called SHAC. They would like to look at their access for people with learning disabilities and suggested a code word system for this group, which is something they have for other groups e.g. someone with substance misuse issues. They could look at an accessible flier and are interested in receiving info on accessibility.

PART TWO: LGBT Consultation

The second part of the event was a consultation led by Speak Out and LGBT HIP. Facilitators introduced a number of topics and summaries of participants' experiences follow:

1. Safety in the community

Participants were asked where they felt safe or unsafe in the community. There was strong theme of familiarity and friendliness of staff as to whether participants found a space/venue safe.

- ✚ One person said they felt safe on buses in the daytime and evening on their own.
- ✚ One other person said they experienced someone being drunk on the bus and now they sometimes don't feel safe.
- ✚ One person who has 24 hour support said they feel the pier is safe.
- ✚ One person talked about not feeling safe although had tried a new café Presuming Ed and thought this was quite good.
- ✚ One person said they use the canteen in City College and feel safe in there.
- ✚ One person felt safe going on trips with Grace Eyre and going to Wetherspoon

2. LGBT groups

Very few participants had accessed LGBT support services. There seemed to be a low level of awareness about what groups and support is available.

- ✚ One person said they didn't know there were support groups e.g. MindOut. They would particularly like a support group around wellbeing and building confidence. Having someone there they know and trust is important
- ✚ One person had attended Allsorts in the past and would like to try again

3. LGBT bars, cafes clubs, sauna

Some participants have been to LGBT bars and clubs. Again, staff friendliness is an important factor in feeling safe and several mentioned loud music and dim lighting being a barrier to access.

- ✚ Five people talked about going to LGBT bars and cafes.
- ✚ One person goes to a male sauna in Brighton and feels safe there.
- ✚ One person particularly liked Red Roaster café. This is a LGBT-friendly café. This person doesn't like bars because they don't drink and don't like the dark.

'Know it is big and safe; feel so comfortable there, very friendly'

- ✚ One person mentioned Charles St bar on the seafront that they felt staff were not friendly.
- ✚ Several bars were mentioned as feeling safe, Legends, R Bar. This seemed to be about staff being friendly or for some people getting to know the staff. Poison Ivy had mixed reviews as too loud for one person and too dark for another.

'I go on my own. Know fellas and staff in them. Poison Ivy know me in there. Feels alright'

- ✚ Five people talked about Pride. One person said the dressing up made him feel safe.
- ✚ A few people felt knowing about the Access Tent by the LGBT Community Safety Forum was useful.
- ✚ None of the women talked about going to LGBT bars, cafes.
- ✚ 1 person said they don't drink

'Not much to do in clubs if you don't drink and it's hard to meet other LGBT people.'

4. Support around relationships

Generally, participants have had limited appropriate support around LGBT relationships. Some participants felt anxious about coming out to support workers or family.

- ✚ Two people who had attended day centres said they had not had opportunities to talk about being LGBT and relationships.

✚ One person who receives community support said they had not had any specific support around relationships.

✚ Two people talked about the difficulty of coming out as LGBT.

‘I didn’t tell my parents for 3 years, I thought I was going to be picked on.’

✚ One person described the anxiety around coming out to his family that they would not support him. He would like more support to tell the rest of his family as he is not sure how to do it and finds it very hard.

5. Making relationships

Participants noted that it was hard to meet other LGBT people if they did not go to bars and clubs. There was also a discussion around the need for initiatives which are set up to support people to make relationships to be LGBT inclusive.

✚ One person said ‘I haven’t got any gay male friends in Brighton.’

✚ One person talked about the difficulty meeting anyone,

‘Don’t end up meeting anyone because don’t go to clubs.’

✚ One woman said need more places to meet other LGBT people.

✚ Several people said they wanted help around dating. Three people were interested in the new dating agency for people with learning disabilities Heart Venture. They felt the agency need to be more inclusive.

‘Needs to feel inclusive, not just for straight community. Put on website LGBT friendly. Put on rainbow flag’

✚ One person talked about a bad experience with London based dating agency for people with learning disabilities:

‘...Went up there with support worker. They didn’t realise I was gay, Awful experience. I was made to feel bad that I had to tell them I was gay.’

✚ One person talked about not wanting a disabled partner as concerned family members would have to support partner as well.

6. What would you like us to do next?

- ✚ Several people said they would like to meet in a group for LGBT people with learning disabilities.
- ✚ Several people said they would be interested in an LGBT night at the Blue Camel Club
- ✚ There were two gaps in provision: (1) an LGBT advocacy group where people could talk about their experiences, similar to the group we held at our event; (2) and a social group, which could meet in different places and try out LGBT bars and services.
- ✚ Everybody apart from one person, who would prefer a 1:1 befriender, would like to be part of a group.
- ✚ Five people were interested in the advocacy style group and three people were interested in social group.

Next Steps

Following this consultation, Speak Out and LGBT HIP are planning a number of activities to act on the finding from the consultation and improve support for LGBT people with learning disabilities.

- ✚ Share findings of consultation with partner agencies to enable service providers to respond to needs identified
- ✚ Collaboratively develop a guide for service providers to improve support for LGBT people with learning disabilities
- ✚ Speak Out is planning an LGBT Advocacy Group with support from LGBT HIP (a bid has been submitted to Healthwatch for funding)
- ✚ LGBT HIP and Speak Out will work with agencies such as Heart Ventures, Blue Camel Club and befriending services to explore ways of increasing LGBT inclusion
- ✚ LGBT HIP will offer LGBT Awareness Training for learning disabilities services

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