Supporting LGBTIQ+ people in homelessness services
An introduction for frontline staff

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Introduction

This briefing for homelessness services is an overview for staff who might be new to thinking about the sexuality and gender identity of the people they support, and who want to develop their understanding of good practice in service delivery for people who identify as LGBTIQ+. It includes suggestions for making services more inclusive, as well as a resource list for further reading and support.

LGBTIQ+ is an acronym that stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer[1] and +[2]. Definitions and terminology within the LGBTIQ+ community can change, therefore it is important to create open and safe spaces within homelessness services in which to talk inclusively and respectfully about sexuality and gender identity.

LGBTIQ+ people are disproportionately more likely to be homeless or insecurely housed than their non-LGBTIQ+ peers, and are at higher risk of substance use and mental health issues due to discrimination, lack of acceptance and abuse. LGBTIQ+ people may face multiple discrimination and they may present specific needs if they are at risk of being homeless.

Service providers are sometimes unaware of the sexuality or gender identity of service users and do not always understand their needs. This means that LGBTIQ+ individuals can struggle to get the right support, delaying their recovery and increasing the likelihood of their needs becoming more complex.

Building an accurate picture of the levels of LGBTIQ+ people within services is a challenge, with many services having poorly worded or non-existent demographic questions and/or non-disclosure from service users. It is highly likely that all organisations will work with LGBTIQ+ service users, whether they are specialist LGBTIQ+ service or not. People may be reluctant to disclose their gender identity or sexuality to staff or other service users, especially if disclosing their sexuality or gender identity has led to abuse and homelessness in the past. Someone may not be comfortable to describe their sexuality or gender identity because they do not identify with the categories being used by a service, or because they are undergoing physical and/or psychological changes that they do not want to (and do not have to) disclose.

Statistics from ONS show that around 2.2% of the UK population identifies as lesbian, gay or bisexual.[3] For younger adults between the ages of 16-24, this rises to 4.4%.[4] However, getting an accurate read on this figure is extremely difficult, as it's only recently that organisations have started to collect data on sexuality and gender identity.

Young people identifying as LGBTIQ+ are more likely to find themselves homeless than their non LGBTIQ+ peers, comprising of 24% of the youth homelessness population.[5] Approximately 4% of individuals using services for people experiencing homelessness identify as being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender

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[1] Queer has historically been used as a slur, however the word has now been reclaimed by the community to take away its power as an insult. However, this term should only be used by those who identify as queer. "Q" can also refer to questioning however, and is indicative of the fact that definitions and terminology are fluid and can change. For the purposes of consistency in this briefing, we have used LGBTIQ+. Please see the glossary at the end for some further definitions.

[2] + is anyone who may not feel they quite fit into any of the aforementioned definitions e.g. asexual people.

[3] www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/sexuality/bulletins/sexualidentityuk/2018

[4] www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/sexuality/bulletins/sexualidentityuk/2018

[5] LGBT Youth Homelessness: A UK national scoping of cause, prevalence, response, and outcome (The Albert Kennedy Trust, 2015) www.akt.org.uk/research

(LGBT).[6] In contrast to the evidence for the general cohort of homeless individuals, young people who identify as LGBTIQ+ reported that the top three reasons for their homelessness were parental rejection, abuse within the family, and aggression/violence in the family.[7] Nearly one in five LGBT people (18%) including 25% of trans people and 28% of LGBT disabled people have experienced homelessness at some point in their lives.[8]

People from these groups may face discrimination and abuse from both people they know and strangers, which can lead to multiple exclusion. Prior to entering homelessness services, LGBTIQ+ people may have issues relating to substance misuse as well as a higher incidence of mental health needs. Once in a service, abuse and homophobia, biphobia and/or transphobia can be perpetrated by services themselves, which means some individuals may disengage and leave the service before they are able to start recovery. It is important for projects to understand the needs of LGBTIQ+ groups so that they can tailor their provision and ensure their service remains inclusive for those who identify as LGBTIQ+. It is also important not to assume that there are no LGBTIQ+ services users in a particular service simply because they are not 'out' about their gender identity or sexuality.

For people seeking asylum and refugees who are homeless identify as LGBTIQ+, it is essential that they – like anyone going through the UK asylum system – seek good quality accredited immigration advice. Solicitors should understand the issues faced by people claiming asylum on the basis of their sexual orientation and gender identity.

Asking people about their sexuality and gender identity

Wider society has an internalised vision of what an LGBTIQ+ person looks like, which is often a stereotype based on media representation. Between this and patchy data collection, some homelessness organisations think they don't have many, if any, LGBTIQ+ people accessing their service.

The Outside Project[9] looked at London CHAIN data[10] from 2017 and found that, after heterosexual, the second largest sexuality was 'prefer not to say'. People in the LGBTIQ+ community often do not feel safe discussing their sexuality or gender identity when rough sleeping. Yet this 'prefer not to say' marker follows them into support services, making it less likely that anyone will offer support, and replicating section 28[11] and the ongoing silence within institutions that are meant to be supporting people.

Consider, for example, that many LQBTIQ+ people who are homeless would 'prefer not to say' who their next of kin is at a first meeting. They may not be ready to talk or think about family if they have experienced trauma or shame that resulted in their homelessness. The Outside Project will check back at different stages of their relationship with someone and at different stages of recovery from homelessness. This approach should be adopted with anyone who answers 'prefer not to say' in response to questions about sexuality and gender identity (see also below re: trans history and confidentiality).

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[6] Homeless Link, Support for Single Homeless People, Annual Review 2019
www.homeless.org.uk/facts/our-research/annual-review-of-single-homelessness-support-in-england
[7] LGBT Youth Homelessness: A UK national scoping of cause, prevalence, response, and outcome (The Albert Kennedy Trust, 2015) www.akt.org.uk/research
[8] Stonewall and YouGov (2018) LGBT in Britain - Home and Communities: www.stonewall.org.uk/lgbt-britain-home-and-communities
[9] http://lgbtiqoutside.org/the-project/
[10] https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/chain-reports
[11] www.pinknews.co.uk/2018/05/24/what-was-section-28-homophobic-legislation-30-years-thatcher/

Consider how uncomfortable it is to hear: "This is a personal question, you don't have to answer this, it's just for our diversity monitoring, but are you homosexual?" Yet this is often how staff in homelessness services approach conversations about sexuality and gender identity. Instead, staff can be respectful and direct, and show equal regard for different identities:

"How do you identify your gender? Male, female, non-binary, trans, other?"

"How do you identify your sexuality? Straight, bi, gay, lesbian, other?"

Using open text boxes in addition to a list can encourage people to self-identify. Otherwise, if someone doesn't see their individual sexuality or gender identity represented, they are more like to respond with 'prefer not to say' or feel they have to choose one of the fixed categories. Where this happens, the service ends up with the wrong information and there is an increased risk that someone disengages from the service.

Case study – The Outside Project

We signpost a young non-binary person from our shelter to a day centre. During registration there is no non-binary or free text box for gender, just male or female. They were assigned male at birth so tick the male box. They are later asked to leave a class that is women only. They explain that they are non-binary, but the service refers back to their initial sign-up form. We advocate that they are non-binary but they are still not given access to the class. They disengage from the service.

This example shows how someone's gender identity was denied when they disclosed that they were non-binary following an initial contact/assessment. This makes our trans and gender non-conforming community feel that they are being accused of trying to access women's space disingenuously.

When staff introduce themselves and partner agencies, they should be sure to include local LGBTIQ+ specific support services: "We work closely with [LGBTIQ+ support service] if this is something you'd like to know more about." See below for more tips about being visibly inclusive when people enter your service.

Staff should also be aware of the particular impacts of homelessness on the community. For example, trans women may present as male for their own safety on the street, where they are at higher risk of sexual assault towards women, as well as sexual and violent assault targeted towards transwomen and hate crime towards the trans community. They may also have no access to toiletries and clothing that would enable them to present as female whilst sleeping rough.

Confidentiality, the law and dead-naming

People who are trans have no obligation to share their trans history. If someone does talk to you about their trans history, it is against the law for you to share this information with anyone else, including your colleagues. For further details see: www.galop.org.uk/trans-privacy-law-2/

It is never appropriate to use the previous name of someone who is trans e.g. "formerly known as [name]" – this practice is referred to as 'dead-naming' and can cause a great deal of stress to trans people. It may also put you in breach of the law that protects confidentiality around someone's trans history.

Creating an inclusive service culture

Ensuring that LGBTIQ+ service users feel welcome in a service can be done in a variety of ways. Embedding LGBTIQ+ inclusive practices into your service will not only communicate an inclusive culture to staff, service users and visitors, but also increases the likelihood of LGBTIQ+ service users feeling safe in your service, potentially for the first time. Here are some tips for good practice:

- Build relationships with LGBTIQ+ specialist services and invite them into your service (in a paid capacity where appropriate). Staff should actively refer clients and clearly advertise these services in public areas.

- Staff should feel confident to challenge homophobia, biphobia and transphobia in all forms. This should, where possible, be done immediately, consistently and effectively.

- LGBTIQ+ inclusion should be a regular feature on team meeting agendas, supervisions and appraisals. Staff should be encouraged to access training, support networks and opportunities to develop their knowledge.

- Avoid language that assumes someone's gender or the gender of their partner, e.g. using 'partner' instead of 'boyfriend' or using 'they' instead of 'he' or 'she' – both with staff and people being supported.

- Use reflective language when talking to someone's gender, or the gender of their partner, e.g. continuing to use gender neutral words when someone may have used their preferred term can be offensive as some people may not want their boyfriend/girlfriend described as 'partners'.

- Trans people can be subject to harassment and abuse in gendered toilets. Where possible, bathrooms should be designed to be unisex e.g. all cubicles equipped with sanitary bins.

- Gender-segregated services should include trans people e.g. transwomen should be able to access women's services.[12]

- Transgender service users are often the most discriminated against and harassed group in the LGBTIQ+ community and face multiple exclusion from healthcare, employment, housing services and education. Services should link with specialist transgender advice and training services to ensure that they reflect current best practice in working with trans service users.

- Target the LGBTIQ+ community in your recruitment for frontline workers and volunteers – 'you cannot be who you cannot see'.

- Ensure LGBTIQ+ options are on your monitoring forms and that you are returning to clients who 'prefer not to say' or checking in with clients at different stages of their recovery from homelessness when they trust you more or are in a safer place to disclose.

- When you are asking about relationships, always include and normalise same sex relationships and partners. There is an increasing awareness of men who don't identify as gay or bisexual but have sex with men. This is a taboo subject among the rough sleeping community, as it is among the prison community. Offer free condom and lube packs.

- Make sure there are visible signs of inclusion, perhaps a rainbow and trans flag in the corner of forms, on lanyards or badges. Wearing these colours doesn't necessarily identify you as being LGBTIQ+ but it

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[12] Equality Act presentation in Homeless Link's PLUS Project Trans Awareness Spotlight resources: www.homeless.org.uk/our-work/national-projects/london-plus-project/plus-project-presentations-and-resources

identifies you as being an ally to the community. The Outside Project gave lanyards to a homeless hostel in London. Within a few weeks several of their long stay, entrenched clients came out as LGBTIQ+ to staff.

- Create LGBTIQ+ staff and client forums and groups. Recognise the community on a regular basis, not just LGBTIQ+ History Month and Pride season, especially those who are further marginalised, the trans, bisexual & intersex community:

  - ➢ Trans Day of Remembrance – 20th November, remembering all trans people who have been murdered over the past year.

  - ➢ Bisexual Visibility Day – 23rd September.

  - ➢ Intersex Awareness – 26th October.

  Introduce simple, small things such as wearing yellow and purple on Intersex Awareness day and discussing why this is important with people in your service.

An evolving language

Language in the LGBTIQ+ community is still evolving, rooted in past criminalisation – at one time in the UK, the community had its own language, Polari, in order to talk without being detected. You don't have to learn Polari, and it is not particularly important to remember in which order to say LGBTIQ+, or even to know what each word means and the new words you'll hear every day. The most important thing is that your clients have space and feel safe to discuss their sexuality and gender identity with you openly, and that you are aware of the LGBTIQ+ services around you so that their needs are met.

Organisations that support the LGBTIQ+ community

akt: Supports LGBTIQ+ homeless young people going through crisis: www.akt.org.uk

akt - Purple Door Project Provides LGBTIQ+ Housing:
www.akt.org.uk/2/SPG446/Purple_Door_Project.aspx

Gendered Intelligence An organisation specifically for trans youth aged 10-25 who also offer training to organisations in trans inclusion: http://genderedintelligence.co.uk/

House Proud LGBTIQ+ staff network for the housing and homelessness sector:
www.lgbtconsortium.org.uk/directory/houseproud

LGBT Foundation is a national charity delivering advice, support and information services to lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) communities: https://lgbt.foundation/

LGBTIQ+ Jigsaw Organisation for homeless LGBTIQ+ youth: www.lgbtjigsaw.net

LGBTIQ+ Domestic Abuse Forum: www.lgbtdaf.org

No Going Back Providing legal representation to LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers - www.nogoingback.org.uk

Stonewall: National organisation providing campaigning, resources and training for LGBTIQ+ community:
www.stonewall.org.uk

Stonewall Housing: A specialist LGBTIQ+ housing advice and support provider in England:
www.stonewallhousing.org

Terence Higgins Trust Works towards tackling HIV and improving sexual health. Their website has a range of resources around sexual health for LGBTIQ+ people. www.tht.org.uk

The Equality Network Works for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTIQ+I) equality and human rights in Scotland www.equality-network.org

The Outside Project runs the UK's first LGBTIQ+ crisis/homeless shelter and community centre:
https://lgbtiqoutside.org/

UK Lesbian & Gay Immigration Group: Promotes equality and dignity for LGBTI people seeking asylum in UK www.uklgig.org.uk

Toolkits, resources and publications to help improve your service

Biphoria Bisexuality & Mental Health report: www.biphoria.org.uk/publications.html

Equality and Human Rights Commission Equality Act 2010: www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act/equality-act-2010

Galop (2009) Filling in the Blanks report highlighting hate crime directed towards people who identify as LGBTIQ+: www.galop.org.uk/filling-in-the-blanks/

Galop Shining the Light report – 10 Keys to Becoming a Trans Positive Organisation: www.galop.org.uk/shine-galop/shining-the-light-resource

Homeless England Search for homelessness services by category or postcode: www.homeless.org.uk/facts/homeless-england

Housing LIN (2013) Building a sense of community: Including older LGBTIQ+ in the way we develop and deliver housing with care: www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/type/Building-a-sense-of-community-Including-older-LGBT-in-the-way-we-develop-and-deliver-housing-with-care

ILC (2008) Housing Issues Affecting Older Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual People in the UK: A Policy Brief: www.ilcuk.org.uk/files/pdf_pdf_69.pdf

ILC (2011) Intergenerational projects for the LGBTIQ+ community: A toolkit to inspire and inform: www.ilcuk.org.uk/index.php/publications/publication_details/celebrating_intergenerational_diversity_among_lgbt_people

Kent County Council (2012) Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Support Toolkit: www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/strategies-and-policies/corporate-policies/equality-and-diversity

London Friend 'Out of Your Mind' report on LGBTIQ+ substance use: www.londonfriend.org.uk/outofyourmind/

NHS (2009) Domestic Violence: Resource for Trans People: www.domesticviolencelondon.nhs.uk/8-case-studies-contact-links/60-resources.html

NHS (2008) Domestic Violence: Resource for gay and bisexual men: www.domesticviolencelondon.nhs.uk/8-case-studies-contact-links/60-resources.html

NHS (2008) Domestic Violence- A resource for lesbian and bisexual women: www.domesticviolencelondon.nhs.uk/8-case-studies-contact-links/60-resources.html

RESPECT (2013) Work with male victims of domestic violence: www.respect.uk.net/work/male-victims-of-domestic-violence/

Shelter (2005) Sexual Exclusion: Issues and Best Practice in Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Housing and Homelessness-report about individuals facing exclusion because of their sexuality: www.england.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_and_research/policy_library/policy_library_folder/sexual_exclusion_issues_and_best_practice_in_lesbian,_gay_and_bisexual_housing_and_homelessness

Stonewall First Steps to Trans Inclusion. An introduction to trans inclusion in the workplace: www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/first_steps_to_trans_inclusion_2016.pdf

Stonewall Information and Advice for LGBTIQ+ communities and their allies: www.stonewall.org.uk/help-advice

Stonewall The Housing Guide for Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual People: www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/HousingGuide.pdf

Stonewall Housing Finding Safe Spaces Toolkit (Understanding the experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Trans Rough Sleepers) www.stonewallhousing.org/finding-safe-spaces.html

Stonewall Housing (2010) Why sexual orientation is important for social housing providers: www.housingqualitynetwork.org.uk/products/serious-detriment-and-health-and-safety/equality-and-human-rights/document320.html

Stonewall Housing (2008) Housing for LGBTIQ+ people experiencing domestic abuse: www.stonewallhousing.org/files/LGBT_Domestic_Abuse.pdf

Stonewall Housing Extensive list of resources www.stonewallhousing.org/links.html

LGBTIQ+ definitions

Sexual orientation and gender identity are not the same and it is important to distinguish between the two. In short:

- Sexual orientation = who a person is attracted to
- Gender identity = an individual's personal sense of identity as masculine or feminine, neither, or a combination. Gender identity can correlate with assigned sex at birth, or can differ from it completely.

The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans Spectrum (LGBTIQ+) encompasses many definitions and identities. The LGBTIQ+ acronym is used to include everyone who feels that are within this spectrum. Here are some of the most used terms:

Biphobia: an irrational or unrealistic hatred, disapproval, or fear of those who identify as bisexual. Biphobia can come from lesbian and gay people as well as heterosexual people. Bisexual people are more likely to hide their sexuality because of how often they will face biphobia.

Cisgender: a person whose gender identity is the same as that which they were assigned at birth

Intersex people: are individuals whose anatomy or physiology differ from contemporary cultural stereotypes of what constitute typical male and female. Intersex infants are often assigned a gender at birth and subjected to surgical procedures to fit the 'correct' anatomy for that gender.

Gender assignment: when a baby is born they are assigned a gender (male or female) at birth by a doctor who bases this judgment on the type of body the baby has. In most cases the child will be reared as the gender they are assigned at birth - as a girl or a boy. Most people feel that the gender they are assigned is the right one, however not everyone does. For transgender or gender non-conforming (GNC) people the gender they were assigned at birth does not match their gender identity.

Gender identity: refers to a person's internal, deeply felt sense of gender. Because gender identity is internal and personally defined, it may not be visible to others. You should not assume someone's gender from their appearance or behaviour.

Heterosexism: a term that applies to negative attitudes, bias, and discrimination in favour of opposite-sex sexual orientation and relationships. It can include the presumption that everyone is heterosexual or that opposite-sex attractions and relationships are the norm and therefore superior.

Homophobia: the irrational and unrealistic hatred, disapproval or fear of gay, lesbian, bisexual or any non-heterosexual people.

Non-binary: Gender is often seen as being an either/or choice, also known as a binary. In this way of seeing gender you can either be male or female, nothing else. Non-binary people don't feel that the two boxes of male or female fit them, or that their identity is more complex than an either/or choice. They may feel like neither, both, or move between the two as they feel comfortable.

Sexual orientation: understood to refer to each person's capacity for profound emotional, affection, and sexual attraction to, and intimate and sexual relationship with, individuals of a different gender, the same gender or more than one gender. Common sexual orientations include gay, lesbian, heterosexual or bisexual.

Transgender: someone whose gender differs from the one they were given when they were born. Transgender people may identify as male or female, a transman or transwoman, or they may use another term altogether.

Trans: an inclusive, umbrella term used to describe the diversity of gender identity and expression for all people who do not conform to binary ideas of gender roles. This can include trans men, trans women, non-binary people, gender queer and gender flexible people. This list is not exhaustive and the language used to describe people's gender identity often changes.

Transition: Transgender people may transition, or change, from the gender they were assigned at birth. They may change their names, pronouns or style of dress. Some transgender people also choose a medical transition, with the help of medical specialists, who will prescribe hormones and/or surgery.

Transphobia: the fear, disapproval or hatred of trans and gender non-conforming people.

It is important to stress that terminology changes, often quickly, and the best approach is to be led by the service user and the terms they use.

While sexuality and gender identity can increase someone's risk of multiple disadvantage and exclusion, which may result in complex needs, each service user is an individual and should receive the same personalised support that any service user receives in a service.

What we do

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for organisations working directly with people who become homeless in England. We work to make services better and campaign for policy change that will help end homelessness.

Let's end homelessness together

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