

# Supporting older Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender people

A checklist for Social Care providers

**Opening Doors London** is supported by:



## Checklist for Social Care Organisations working with older Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender people.

Many older LGBT people are scared of growing old and needing care.

***“Older Gay People in sheltered/residential care are ignored and trapped within a heterosexual environment – detrimental to health and dignity”<sup>1</sup>***

LGBT people come from diverse backgrounds with very different life experiences and expectations. We live in a society which generally assumes that everyone is heterosexual and has a fixed gender identity. This can make some LGBT people feel excluded, isolated or unwelcome. So, older LGBT people often do not ‘come out’ and their ‘needs’ are not recognised by their social care organisations, even though 5-7% of our older population are LGBT.

It is now against the law<sup>2</sup> to discriminate on the basis of a person’s: actual sexual orientation; the sexual orientation he/she is thought to have; and or the sexual orientation of someone with whom he/she is associated. The 2010 Equalities Act gives transgender people similar rights.<sup>3</sup>

This checklist<sup>4</sup> aims to assist organisations to become LGBT friendly (i.e. to ‘come out’ to older LGBT clients as “gay friendly”) so that the organisations more readily meet their requirements under the Equalities Act and the older person feels able to “come out” to the organisation and be fully themselves.

The checklist is designed for organisations to ‘check’ themselves on how “LGBT friendly” they are, with suggestions on how to improve. It is a beginning – we expect it to change and improve over time.

If you have suggestions for changes or would like to comment please contact us.

<sup>1</sup> Survey of older gay and bisexual men by Opening Doors Central London February 2008

<sup>2</sup> Equality Act (sexual orientation) Regulations 2007

<sup>3</sup> Equality Act 2010 “Public sector authority or organisation carrying out a public sector duty function must eliminate discrimination or harassment and advance equality of opportunity” for people with a protected characteristic which includes “sexual orientation” as well as “gender reassignment”.

<sup>4</sup> The checklist has drawn heavily from the Care Quality Commission (CSCl’s) good practice guidelines and the guidelines for inspectors. The CQC is now actively monitoring how social care organisations work with LGBT clients.



## 1. Organisation-Wide Ways to be LGBT- Friendly

*“When social care has been agreed it is alarming to be met by different carer almost every time the bell rings and you open the door. Then the worry begins again. “Oh my goodness do they know I’m gay are they going to humiliate me.”*  
Service User 2010

		Pls tick
<b>Show people you are LGBT friendly</b>	Use images in your promotional materials e.g. same sex couples, Rainbow flag.	
	Use images in your buildings e.g. reception areas, common rooms, assessment rooms.	
	Use the words Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender whenever appropriate in your literature.	
<b>Liaison Officer</b> The Metropolitan Police have an LGBT liaison officer to ‘build the trust’ between the LGBT community and the police – they act as a conduit for communication	A Social care example of how it might work:  <i>An older gay man needs some care, but is scared of disclosing his sexuality to the care assessor. (He has pictures of his ex partner on the wall at home, should he hide them?) He calls the liaison officer, who acts on his behalf, liaising with care agencies and making sure he does not get a homophobic response.</i>	
<b>Monitoring</b> Monitoring sexual orientation should be introduced <i>alongside</i> other actions on LGBT equality. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Confidentiality needs to be made clear and staff need to be trained</li> </ul>	<b>Stonewall<sup>5</sup> recommends the following wording:</b>  What is your sexual orientation? Bisexual Gay man Gay woman/Lesbian Heterosexual/straight Prefer not to say	

<sup>5</sup> Stonewall Workplace Guides: Monitoring How to monitor sexual orientation in the workplace(  
www.stonewall.org.uk/workplace

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We advise the organisation to 'come out' first e.g. publish the anonymised diversity data of the staff group, e.g. 40% women, 30% BME, 15% LGBT</li> </ul>		
<b>Relationships</b>	All policies or working practices about relationships need to apply equally to same sex relationship and relationship between people of the opposite sex.	
	Ensure that people are given an opportunity to nominate their next of kin and that this can include friends as well as partners or family.	
<b>LGBT champion</b>	Appoint an LGBT champion on your boards and advisory or user groups.	
<b>Media</b>	Use the LGBT media for features about your work, human interest stories, recruitment - let the LGBT community know you are friendly.	
	Include LGBT reading matter in your reception area, centres or homes.	





## 2 Ensuring older LGBT people are supported by LGBT Friendly Staff

***"There is an overall commitment [in the agency] to tackling homophobia, but I am not sure that they really understand the need for staff to be comfortable [as opposed to vaguely tolerant, or trying not to mind] with my being a lesbian"***<sup>6</sup>

This needs to be done in two ways: ensuring a culture promoting LGBT friendly working AND allowing LGBT clients as much choice as possible in who works with them. It is important to note here that although religious organisations, in limited circumstances, can legally refuse to work with LGBT people, individuals cannot.<sup>7</sup>

<b>Staff Management</b>	Managers need to give staff consistent messages about expectations on equality and enable staff to discuss these issues regularly, for example through staff supervision, appraisals and staff meetings.	
<b>Training</b> Training on equality and diversity issues must include training on working with LGBT people  This needs to be mandatory for all levels of staff and to be at least a day – with time to talk (i.e. not a two hour video session!)	Training should include: looking at not making assumptions, asking open questions, and a knowledge of the context of LGBT older peoples lives. Women should not automatically be called 'Mrs' they should be asked how they wish to be addressed. Don't assume that a service user with children is heterosexual.	
<b>Safeguarding Adults</b>	LGBT harassment and homophobia need to be explicitly mentioned in safeguarding policies and included in training - ranging from active bullying to hidden bullying such as not talking to people.	
<b>Staff Recruitment</b>	Must include an assessment of the attitudes of potential staff around equality issues including equality for LGBT people.	

<sup>6</sup> CSCI – Putting People First – Equality and Diversity Matters 2007

<sup>7</sup> CSCI – Putting People First – Equality and Diversity Matters 2007

	Get your staff to sign an equalities statement with an explicit reference to supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people (including agency staff). Make sure they understand what they are signing.	
<b>Set up an LGBT staff group</b> <sup>8</sup> (see Stonewall Workplace Guides)		
<b>User Choice</b>	<p>There may be circumstances, where 'matching' staff to particular types of assistance for LGBT service users would be beneficial to the person using the service.</p> <p>It is important to listen when people want to change staff, homophobic attitudes can be very pervasive, but hard for a service user to make a specific complaint about.</p>	



<sup>8</sup> Stonewall Workplace Guides



### 3 Care Management and social care assessment<sup>9</sup>

***“As an out gay man it is quite impossible to contact social care. My Care agency refuses to tell carers about my sexual orientation and my present agency does not send gay friendly staff. Sometimes they send staff who are African Evangelical Christians. When they find out I’m gay, they tell me I’m going to hell”***

*Service User Sept 2010*

<b>Environment</b>	Ensure an LGBT friendly environment – if the assessment is happening in your centre – make sure the space is private and has positive LGBT imagery.	
<b>Confidentiality</b>	Be clear about the confidentiality of the assessment at the beginning – who else will see it.	
<b>Ensure that an element of assessment includes open questions about their lives:</b>	<p><i>E.g. would you like to tell us who are the important people in your life?</i></p> <p><i>Do you need support to keep up contact with anyone in particular, how do you like to spend your leisure time?</i></p> <p><i>Do you need support to be involved with any groups or activities?</i></p> <p><i>Is there anything you would like to tell us about what is important to you in your life?</i></p>	
<b>Avoid questions that assume people are heterosexual</b>	E.g. Don’t ask about husband or wife when you are getting to know people– talk about partner, significant others or friends.	

<sup>9</sup> CSCI – Putting People First – Equality and Diversity Matters 2007





#### 4) Caring – Care Staff (homes, day care and in the home)

***“I dread the day when I may need personal care, or am forced to live in a communal situation where my sexuality is a problem” Service User 2010***

***“When social care staff are in my home, I sometimes feel like a stranger, because I have to hide photos, literature etc. which use the words ‘gay’”  
Service user 2010***

<b>Relationships</b>	Recognise LGBT partners in the same way that heterosexual partners are recognised, for example, around visiting or the need for privacy – expect cuddling and hand holding.	
	If people using your service need support around relationships, ensure that staff have opportunities for training and development in this area and that the impact of homophobia is included in any learning.	
<b>Capacity</b>	If someone lacks capacity and there is uncertainty or disagreement about who should be involved in decisions about their care, involve an independent advocate.	
<b>Environment</b>	Care homes should consider whether their environment recognises LGBT cultures, for example, by providing magazines and newsletters that are for the LGBT communities. This can also assist in making the environment more comfortable for LGBT people who have not come out. Books in the library etc.	
<b>Transgender</b>	A transgender person should be recognised as (and treated according to) the gender they have spent their lives expressing.	
	Allow transgender people access to appropriate single-sex facilities which are in line with their gender identity.	

	<p>Be aware that some transgender people may have specific personal care needs and handle these sensitively. For example trans women who have transitioned later in life may still need to shave regularly. Trans people who have personal care needs require support from workers who understand that their body may not match their gender identity.</p>	
	<p>Confidentiality around someone's transgender status is very important.</p> <p>Section 22 of Gender Recognition Act stipulates that it is an offense for a person who has acquired protected information in an official capacity to disclose that information to any other person.</p>	





## Resources and Reading

CSCI (2007) "Putting People First: Equality and Diversity Matters."

[www.cqc.org.uk](http://www.cqc.org.uk)

Stonewall (2009) "Workplace Guides Monitoring: How to monitor Sexual Orientation in the work place."

[www.Stonewall.org.uk](http://www.Stonewall.org.uk)

Peter Davies, Lindsay River (2006) "Being Taken Seriously: The Polari in Partnership project – promoting change for older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals."

[www.casweb.org/polari](http://www.casweb.org/polari)

CQC (2009) "Guidance for inspectors: How we promote the rights of people whatever their sexual orientation."

[www.cqc.org.uk](http://www.cqc.org.uk)

S Knocker (2006) "The whole of Me: meeting the needs of older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals living in care homes and extra care housing." Age concern England.

[www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk)

Department of Health (2007) "Reducing health inequalities for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people: briefings for health and social care staff."

[www.dh.gov.uk](http://www.dh.gov.uk)

S Knocker and Mike Phillips (2010) "Opening Doors: The Story So far."

[www.ageconcerncamden.org.uk](http://www.ageconcerncamden.org.uk)

Equality Act 2010:

[www.equalities.gov.uk](http://www.equalities.gov.uk) section 149

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