



## **Say it Loud, Say it Proud**

A practical guide to engaging and involving lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) survivors of domestic abuse in the development of services.

### **Early Steps to Safety**

In March 2011, the LGBT Domestic Abuse Forum held a seminar that focused on the experience of working with survivors of domestic abuse who identified as LGBT. The aims were to:

- increase the voice of victims/survivors in the LGBT community and domestic abuse support service
- look at best practice - What works, what doesn't?
- examine the hurdles that LGBT survivors face to be able to participate in domestic abuse services
- Identify safety issues when involving LGBT survivors

Participants had the opportunity to listen to speakers from five leading organisations; Imaan, Imkaan, MST-GMSH, Shine (GALOP) and Stonewall Housing, who shared their experience of working with LGBT survivors and how each of their organisations were successful in fully integrating survivors' voices and experiences into the delivery of their service. Presentations from that event are available to download from the LGBT DAF website and speaker contact details are included at the end of this document.

In workshops, participants at the event were asked to write their own ten step guide to service user involvement, which was then fed back to the group as shared learning. This guide captures that learning.

LGBT DAF would like to thank all participants in the Say it Loud, Say it Proud event. The enthusiasm, energy, expertise, willingness to listen and share experiences has shaped this guide, which hopefully will become a reference point to expand existing services and develop new services that are inclusive to all LGBT survivors of domestic abuse.



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### **We don't have any LGB or T service users**

If you are working with survivors of domestic abuse and you do not know that they identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans (LGB or T), you will not be able to assess their risk or provide appropriate services to them. The first step needs to be monitoring: establish a bench mark and measure the increase in LGBT survivors. There is good guidance on monitoring the LGBT communities available from Stonewall Housing. See Further Reading.

The Equality Act requires all public services to demonstrate that they have taken sexuality and gender identity into consideration when developing new services. It is never safe to assume that your clients are all heterosexual and have always been heterosexual, or to assume that your client's gender is fixed and has always been fixed. You may be working with LGB or T clients already.

### **Training**

Training around sexuality and gender identity should be provided to staff before engaging with clients to monitor sexuality and gender identity. This is because some staff may feel uncomfortable

about requesting this type of information, and this discomfort is likely to be picked up by LGBT survivors who will only trust your organisation if you demonstrate, through positive actions, that you already have a good understanding of their needs. If your organisation is not at that point, training is essential. LGBT survivors will be unlikely to commit time or energy – for example, attending focus groups, taking part in research or any other participation activity - if that organisation has not committed the time to learn the basics.

Train front line staff and also senior management, trustees and management committee members. One-size-fits-all training will not be appropriate as different jobs will require tailored training, dependent on seniority. A skills audit of staff maybe needed to identify training needs.

Training should include specific issues that LGBT survivors encounter and not be tagged onto generic training.

Don't be afraid to ask questions. This is a specialist area and no one knows all the answers. If your organisation plans to work with LGBT survivors, but does not have funding to train all staff, contact your local LGBT support group or community group and suggest a skill swap. This may help build links to the community and will also help build the capacity and knowledge base within LGBT services relating to domestic abuse.

Do not try to pack all LGB and T domestic abuse issues into one afternoon training session. If you do try to do this, your training session will be at too basic a level to enhance survivors' safety. A series of workshops might be a more realistic approach.

Learn or refresh the legal requirements of your organisation, post-Equality Act. Make use of the resources available via the national LGBT organisations - Stonewall, LGBT Consortium, Broken Rainbow, Press for Change and National LGB&T Partnership. Share your learning with your staff team, managers, trustees or management committee. Spread the word, share the love.

### **Promotion**

Don't assume that because you have put a leaflet up in your local gay pub, it will be read by all lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans spectrum people. LGBT people are as diverse as any other section of the community. A different and tailored approach needs to be developed to engage with each type of community. For example, leaflets in a gay pub may not reach any trans people, who might have experienced transphobia at that venue. Many lesbians do not enjoy socialising in venues that are dominated by men. For that reason, some venues advertise women-only nights, in which case a leaflet drop on that night will yield better results.

Targeting advertising using the internet or LGBT specific press/publications might be more effective. Try on-line forums, newsletters, social networks where LGB and T survivors can get information without their partners/ friends watching them.

Engage with the LGB and T communities at social events - for example, Pride, Black Pride, International Day Against Homophobia (IDAHO), LGBT History Month, Lesbian and Gay Film Festival,

Trans Day of Remembrance, any and all training events that focus on LGBT people. Create an annual LGBT events calendar and add local events too.

It is a myth that the LGB and T communities are “hard to reach”. It may be that there are communities your organisation has not reached out to yet but that is your organisation’s problem, rather than the communities’.

When advertising your event, steer clear of term like ‘client forum’, ‘consultation’, ‘evaluation’, ‘client feedback’, ‘service user involvement’ or ‘engagement’. These words are jargon and may turn people off.

If you are an LGBT organisation, build links with the domestic violence sector and all major services at a local level. Similarly, if you are a generic service provider, build links with local LGBT organisations, social groups, your local LGBT police liaison officer or LGBT forum.

Partnership working is good as long as it’s an equal partnership. An organisation that is poor in terms of power, size or finance, may be rich in terms of specialist knowledge and support.

*“ We know that statistically there is a problem... the work that we do with groups who work with violence against women tell us that all the women who use their services are heterosexual... we know that this cannot possibly be true, we need to delve further, interrogate the data.. .when you look at the BAMER stats in LGBT groups the absence of BAMER service users is also problematic...” Anjum Mouj – Imkaan*

### **Planning your participation**

To fully understand domestic abuse experienced by LGB and T survivors, and deliver advice, safety, and support that is appropriate and timely, requires commitment, imagination and time. Usually this can’t be achieved by one person alone and should not be left to “*the only gay in the village (or organisation)*”. Set up a working party and share the work as well as the learning and achievements.

Research the communities you want to engage with before you consult with them. LGB and T people experience domestic abuse within a context of a homophobic and transphobic society. Research civil and legal protections, housing options, health issues, cultural and religious issues that will affect the choices available to survivors.

Previous experience of services will be influential when deciding who first to contact for advice, support or intervention. This means routes to safety may be limited and priorities may be different. For example, a trans client waiting for surgery on the NHS might be reluctant to be relocated to a new area as this would delay gender reassignment. The need for gender reassignment and increased emotional wellbeing might be a higher personal priority than physical safety.

A historic negative experience with the police, the court system, social services, education, children’s services, housing services, health services, religious institutions and the voluntary sector may need to be acknowledged before work can begin to build services for the future.

Ensure that your confidentiality policy is up to date. The LGB communities are small; the trans community is even smaller. LGBT people who are out on the *scene* may know each other and each other's partners. Reassurance around confidentiality is paramount to build trust.

Be aware that some LGB and T people may have children, which might also inform their experience of your service. Questions should be tailored to ensure that LGB and T parents or carers are included in your service feedback.

Survivors may be reluctant to discuss domestic abuse with non-LGBT groups because they may have split loyalties. Revealing that all is not rosy in the queer world for some seems like a betrayal. Make sure you reassure any participants that the information they share with you will be made anonymous and not passed on to third parties.

When writing new service information, leaflets or updating websites, make sure you include advice around the Equality Act and the government's definition of domestic violence, and make clear how this relates to LGBT survivors. This will encourage service users to engage.

Risk assess all participation events. The community is too small and people may know each other via networks.

When organising interpreters or signers, be aware that when using small community groups, some LGBT people from those cultural groups might be reluctant to talk about their sexuality, their gender identity, or domestic abuse they have experienced, for fear that this information might be circulated to other people in the community. If this is a possibility, use phone line interpreting rather than face-to-face to increase a sense of confidentiality, especially at first involvement.

If money for interpreting is an issue, try google translate, or another free online interpreting service. There are limitations regarding translation using this method as not every language is available via on-line translation services and not every language, appropriately translates the words 'lesbian', 'gay', 'bisexual' and 'trans' or the many words or definitions that are used to define sexuality or gender identity in the UK.

## **Representation**

Recruit LGBT representatives in your organisation and at every level. Ensure that positive recruitment of LGB and T people is included in your recruitment policies and procedures.

*"No about us without us." Ben Gooch, Galop*

## **Why would survivors want to get involved?**

People need to achieve something by getting involved with your organisation. Some people will get involved because they realise that their voice can change a service. They may have been given opportunities, in the past, to shape and influence services. Other people, whose voice has historically been overlooked, do not tend to believe that their voice will be valued or that it has

power. For an organisation to ensure that all service users are equally involved, different strategies need to be developed to capture difference and diversity in your client group.

Be transparent. Before you involve clients, let them know the structure, the process and the likely outcomes of getting involved. When summarizing feedback given to your organisation, ensure that your client group has a chance to add final comments before it is circulated. If your document is intended to be read by people in your organisation at policy/management level, rather than service users, then make sure that your service users receive the finished document too. This is the fruit of their labour.

*“I asked myself, why do I need to listen to survivors, I’m a lesbian survivor myself, I know all about domestic violence. But when I listened to others, I realised that my experience is just one experience and each experience is as different as Monday is from Friday. We think we know it all. We don’t.” Anon. LGBT DAF Event participant*

### **Practicalities**

LGB and T survivors who give feedback about your organisation are giving you a great gift. It takes courage to speak out about your experiences, and exceptional courage to talk to the people you have gone to for help about how they can improve. Every step should be made to ensure that your service users’ experience is a positive one and that their needs are your top priority.

*“Follow these three rules. Be creative. Be innovative. Use incentive”  
Cat Haldane Housing Support Officer for Stonewall Housing*

### **When and where?**

Only start organising client participation events when you have done your homework, read the research and guidance out there and you have fully trained your staff.

Check your queer calendar to make sure that your event does not clash with, for example Pride, which for many LGBT people has the same status as a religious event. Also check religious celebration days.

Ensure that your venue is also accessible in terms of travel to and from the venue. Many trans people experience a great deal of transphobia and crime on public transport and many do not travel on the tube because they feel that if an incident occurred, there would be no safe exit. Make sure you give several travel options to people attending, for example, focus groups. If you are planning an event at night, ensure that participants are happy with transport arrangements when it ends. If in doubt, offer a trusted taxi service.

If you are uncertain that the venue is suitable, or it is known to be a hot spot for homophobic or transphobic abuse, ask for suggestions from your service users about where they would feel safe to meet.

In some locations, where there is not a large LGB or T population, group interviews in person might not be safe as one survivor might know the perpetrator on another survivor, thus increasing risk. In these situations, suggest using Skype, email or a telephone interview, or ask your clients which might be the safest option for them.

Some trans people experience so much transphobia when they travel that it is not safe for them to wear the clothes associated with the gender they know themselves to be. For this reason, some trans people might require a safe changing area.

Make sure your venue has gender-neutral toilets. Asking or expecting trans people to use toilets designed for people with disabilities is not acceptable.

Make sure your venue feels safe. It could be simple things like LGBT support group posters, information about LGBT health services, lesbian parenting groups, gay adoption organisations. Stonewall sell some great posters including “some people are gay, get over it” or “Love your inner lesbian”

### **Other issues to consider**

Providing food/drink cannot be underestimated. People will participate better if they feel their opinions are valued. Providing good quality snacks and beverages helps people relax and provides an unspoken reaffirmation that their experiences are important. Ensure that any food/beverages are appropriate to the client group. i.e. vegetarian/halal /lactose intolerant

Ensure that your clients are canvassed at a time that does not clash with their religion or beliefs. If you are providing food/drink and are expecting people to participate who are fasting - move the event to a time that is suitable for all participants.

Ensure that venues are accessible in terms of mobility, disability or language

Provide childcare or offer financial assistance to arrange childcare whilst consultations are taking place.

Service users who offer their time for free should always be offered travel costs to and from the venue. If you can afford vouchers as a thank you, even better.

### **The content**

Be creative. Clients engage in things they help create. Check out other organisations’ visuals, creative ideas, art, comics, theatre, short films, blogs, documentaries, poetry or videos. Making things encourages ownership. Try and see what works; events, raffles, parties, BBQs, picnics, quiz/questionnaires, self-defence, self-care, or knitting circles. Client participation events do not always have to seem like client participation. Use events as a framework to guide discussions.

When talking to LGB or T survivors don’t assume that the perpetrator or perpetrators also identify as LGB or T. Many LGB and T survivors report abuse from parents, extended family members, or

from previous relationships where the perpetrator identifies as heterosexual and non-trans. Abuse frequently includes honour-based violence or forced marriage.

Do not use the phrase, “LGBT relationships”. It is possible to have LGB relationships, i.e. people of the same sex in a relationship, but the same may not apply to people who identify as trans.

Transgender identity is about identifying as the gender you know yourself to be rather than the gender that you were assigned at birth. It is not about who you are attracted to. You can’t have a “trans relationship” but you can have a relationship that involves trans people. Trans people may identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, heterosexual or a range of other sexualities or gender identities.

LGB and T people use a spectrum of definitions to identify who they are. New words and definitions are constantly being created. If you ask your clients to identify their sexuality or gender, leave a space for clients to use their own definitions.

Be pronoun-aware, and ask others to respect the sexuality and gender identity of others in the group. Do not assume the gender identity of your participants. Ask people, “What is your preferred pronoun?”

If working with clients who are engaging with a process - for example, speaking at a conference - ensure that there is time at the end to take stock of their experience, take a breather and give time to recover.

Discuss an exit strategy for clients who no longer want to participate or at the end of the consultation process.

Celebrate what you have created. Reward involvement with awards, certificates.

Cultural knowledge about the LGBT community is important to build trust and must be understood to provide safe working practices, but it is also important to understand the nature of an abusive relationship. Knowledge and understanding about domestic abuse experienced by LGBT people needs to be heard. For example, what are the similarities? Blame, guilt, low self-esteem, power and control.

### **A word on focus groups**

Focus groups need careful consideration and safety planning when involving LGB and T survivors. This is due to the small nature of the various scenes. Confidentiality needs building into ground rules. Focus group leaders need to ask participants to build their own ground rules that include confidentiality.

Focus group ground rules need to specifically mention new media, such as Twitter and Facebook or blogs, and ask participants to honour confidentiality post-group in all media and specifically new media.

Focus groups should recognise that participants may know other participants’ partners/family members. One solution to this is to ask participants to use pseudonyms, maybe choosing the name of an artist/singer/superhero.

Focus group dynamics: Acknowledge experts in the group. Tell people that there will be an opportunity to participate post-session, as some people may want to participate in one-to-one sessions rather than as part of a group.

Be aware of stereotypes when talking about minority communities. Using assumptions about any community does not assist practitioners or indeed people in that community. It is important to dispel myths in both the LGBT community and also the Muslim/BMER community. Be ready to challenge stereotypes.

### **Further steps**

Use the finding of your client feedback to inform new strategies, develop new safety planning, support planning, and risk assessments that are relevant to LGBT experience of domestic abuse.

There is no substitute for a dedicated service-user involvement officer to ensure that your organisation develops and implements plans around service users. If your organisation is staffed by volunteers, recruit a dedicated volunteer.

Listen, talk and listen. Be prepared to make changes. Change and engage with change. The purpose of LGBT service-user involvement is to kick-start change within your organisation and to work towards providing better, quicker and more appropriate routes to safety. Reading this guide and taking note of the document is just the start of change.

### **Further Reading**

**LGBT Almanac:** Kiaros-in-Soho

**Choose to Stop: A booklet for gay and bi men:** Respect

**Comparing domestic abuse in same sex and heterosexual relationships:** Donovan, Hester, Holmes, McCarry Sunderland and Bristol University.

**Count Me in Too. Report in to LGBT experience in Brighton:** Dr Cath Brown and Spectrum

**Domestic Violence : A resource for trans people**

**Domestic Violence : A resource for gay and bisexual men**

**Domestic Violence : A resource for lesbians bisexual women**

Barking and Dagenham PCT

**Engendered Penalties: Trans gender and transsexual experience of inequality and discrimination:** Press for Change

**Engaging with LGBT People:** Stonewall Housing

**Filling in the blanks: a report into unreported LGBT crime:** Galop

**Housing Options for LGBT survivors:** Stonewall Housing

**Lesbian, bisexual and trans women's services in the UK:** Women's Resource Centre

**LGBT Forced Marriage:** Forced Marriage Unit

**Monitoring Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity:** Stonewall Housing

**Prescription for change: Lesbian and Bisexual women's health:** Stonewall

**Prevalence of domestic violence among lesbian and gay men:** Stigma

**Shining the light: 10 keys to becoming a trans positive organisation:** Shine @ Galop

**Talk it over: Support and advice to men in abusive relationships:** Men's advice line

**Transgender experience of domestic abuse:** Scottish trans alliance

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For further information about this and future events contact

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