

Supporting LGBTQ+ people in homelessness services

An introduction for frontline staff

Let's end homelessness together

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Introduction

This briefing for homelessness services is an introduction and resource list for staff who might be new to thinking about the personal and sexual identity of the people they support, and who want to develop their understanding of good practice in service delivery for people who identify with being LGBTQ+.

LGBTQ+ is an acronym that stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer¹ and +². Definitions and terminology within the LGBTQ+ community can change, therefore it is important to create open and safe spaces within homelessness services in which to talk inclusively and respectfully about sexual and gender identity.

LGBTQ+ people are disproportionately more likely to be homeless or insecurely housed than their non-LGBTQ+ peers, and are at higher risk of substance use and mental health issues due to discrimination, lack of acceptance and abuse. LGBTQ+ 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 LGBTQ+ 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 LGBTQ+ 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 LGBTQ+ service users, whether they are specialist LGBTQ+ service or not. People may be reluctant to disclose their gender identity or sexuality to staff or other service users, especially if their own sense of sexual identity is unclear or if they are undergoing other physical and/or psychological changes.

Statistics show that 1.7% of the UK population identifies as lesbian, gay or bisexual. For younger adults between the ages of 16-24, this rises to 3.3%, the largest of any age group.³ 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 LGBTQ+ are more likely to find themselves homeless than their non LGBTQ+ peers, comprising of 24% of the youth homelessness population.⁴ Approximately 4% of individuals using services for people experiencing homelessness identify as being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT).⁵ In contrast to the evidence for the general cohort of homeless individuals, young people that identify

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 LGBTQ+, though 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 or intersex people.

³ www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/sexuality/bulletins/sexualidentityuk/2015

⁴ Albert Kennedy Trust, LGBT Youth Homelessness: A UK national scoping of cause, prevalence, , response, and outcome - www.akt.org.uk/page.aspx?langid=2&itemID=SPG349

⁵ Homeless Link, Support for Single Homeless People, Annual Review 2016

www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/sexuality/bulletins/sexualidentityuk/2015

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as LGBTQ+ reported that the top three reasons for their homelessness were parental rejection, abuse within the family, and aggression/violence in the family.⁶

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, LGBTQ+ 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 LGBTQ+ groups so that they can tailor their provision and ensure their service remains inclusive for those who identify as LGBTQ+. It is also important not to assume that there are no LGBTQ+ services users in a particular service simply because they are not 'out' about their gender identity or sexuality.

For homeless asylum seekers and refugees who identify as LGBTQ+, it is essential for them – like anyone going through the UK asylum system – to 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.

Examples of good practice

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

- Build relationships with LGBTQ+ specialist services and invite them into your service. 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.
- LGBTQ+ 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.
- Avoiding 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'.
- 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 non-gendered, for instance putting a sign on accessible toilets saying they are non-gendered.

⁶ Albert Kennedy Trust, LGBT Youth Homelessness: A UK national scoping of cause, prevalence, response, and outcome - www.akt.org.uk/page.aspx?langid=2&itemID=SPG349

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- Gender-segregated services should include trans people e.g. transwomen should be able to access women's services.
- Transgender service users are often the most discriminated against and harassed group in the LGBTQ+ 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.

Organisations that support the LGBTQ+ community

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

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

LGBTQ+ Domestic Abuse Forum: www.lgbtdaf.org

No Going Back Providing legal representation to LGBTQ+ asylum seekers - www.nogoinback.org.uk

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

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

The Albert Kennedy Trust: Supports LGBTQ+ homeless young people going through crisis: www.akt.org.uk

The Albert Kennedy Trust - Purple Door Project Provides LGBTQ+ Housing: www.akt.org.uk/2/SPG446/Purple_Door_Project.aspx

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

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

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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:
http://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/first_steps_to_trans_inclusion_2016.pdf

Stonewall Information and Advice for LGBTQ+ 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 LGBTQ+ people experiencing domestic abuse:
www.stonewallhousing.org/files/LGBT_Domestic_Abuse.pdf

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

LGBTQ+ 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 (LGBTQ+) encompasses many definitions and identities. The LGBTQ+ 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 sexual identity 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.

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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 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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