

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION WITH LGBT PEOPLE OVER 50



Executive Summary

"We want ordinariness but within the context of our ordinariness."

Six key themes emerged from the consultation:

- There is a strong need for **social connection**
- Over half of people are **selective about being out**
- There are key **geographical differences in access** to services in Lothian, Glasgow, and in the rest of Scotland
- People travel to **urban areas** to access LGBT spaces
- There are particular challenges faced by **transgender** people
- Aging as an LGBT person often creates **specific additional challenges**.

Overview

LGBT Health and Wellbeing, as part of its LGBT Age work, carried out extensive community consultation on the social, information and support needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people aged over 50 in Scotland's central belt.

We received 182 responses to our Community Survey between June and August 2013; and 37 people attended 6 consultation events in Glasgow and Edinburgh.

Community Survey and Consultation Events

The aim of the consultation was to collect data about the experiences and needs of LGBT people over 50, with particular emphasis on:

- The lived experience as an older LGBT person of 'being out' and of accessing mainstream services and social and support networks
- The experience, wants and needs of older LGBT people in relation to the availability of social opportunities and appropriate information.

WHO RESPONDED?

AGE: Two thirds of survey respondents were under 60. Reaching those in their 60s, 70s and 80s proved more challenging. The age range was from 50-89 (67% were aged 50-59; 27% aged 60-69; 6% 70 and over).

GENDER: 54% identified as female, 42% as male and 4% as 'other' (most within this group identified as transgender).

SEXUAL ORIENTATION: 43% identified as lesbian, 41% as gay/homosexual, 10% as bisexual and 6% as heterosexual.

TRANSGENDER STATUS: 15% identified as transgender (24 respondents).

The survey was distributed online, and via our publicity networks, through other LGBT and community organisations, and at Pride events in Glasgow and Edinburgh.

In terms of geographical spread, 46% of respondents were from Edinburgh and the Lothians, 29% from Glasgow and Greater Glasgow and 25% from other areas of Scotland. The higher response from Edinburgh and Lothians reflects a more extensive network of LGBT services, community organisations and social groups, as well as our community reach as an organisation.

This report identifies the key findings from the consultation both generically across the LGBT population and highlights significant variations in relation to gender, gender identity or geographical location. The quotes used throughout are from the survey responses and consultation events.

Key Findings

Being Out

Significantly, whilst 42% of respondents were living their lives openly, 54% had varying levels of ‘outness’ (57% were out to other LGBT people, 52% to ‘most close friends’, 41% to ‘most family’, 26% to work colleagues and 18% to their neighbours) with 4% of respondents remaining totally closeted (9% outside the urban areas of Edinburgh and Glasgow).

Contact With Other LGBT People

- 81% of respondents identified that they had LGBT friends
- 39% used the gay commercial scene
- 28% attend social activity groups (71% of transgender people)
- 35% used social media
- 12% do not or rarely have contact with other LGBT people.

One of the striking differences between the two cities was in the number of social groups available for older LGBT people. In Edinburgh several were named, but none were named in Glasgow, though there were references to the loss of Glasgow’s LGBT Centre.

“Starting place is ‘alone’ – you then look for commonality and move into ‘similar lived groups’.”

LGBT people often travel, in some cases significant distances, in order to have contact with other LGBT people. 12% of respondents from Greater Glasgow and 18% from the rest of Scotland indicated they use Edinburgh’s LGBT Centre.

Use of the Commercial Gay Scene

56% use the commercial gay scene less now than they had when they were younger; 28% had never used this as a means of socialising (13% of men, 37% of women and 60% of transgender people).

“Too old to fit in and very little for women. Generally feel very uncomfortable.”

“Mostly younger people on the scene, nothing for older people who may wish to just meet up for a chat.”

Interest in Social Contact

The theme of social isolation emerged strongly in the consultation events, with great support for activities aimed at an older age group. Many participants spoke of their social needs changing, and the commercial LGBT scene and community events such as the annual Pride festival being very youth-oriented. Transgender respondents identified not feeling safe in non-LGBT social outlets.

76% of survey respondents stated they would welcome increased opportunities for contact with other LGBT people. Of these most would prefer to meet up with people similar in age to themselves (64%) and would be interested in joining groups or organised activities to do this (61%).

It is clear that there is significant unmet need, and further that to benefit from increased social contact many would need support (23% said they did not know how to meet other LGBT people; 21% said they were too shy to do this; 17% said they would like support to do this).

There was also considerable demand for gender and gender identity-specific events (59% of female respondents, 51% of male respondents and 85% of transgender participants).

“We don’t have a gay community - or a gay community that is age inclusive.”

“As I have reached my 50s my LGBT social circle has significantly decreased in number, mostly because it was formed around going out on the scene. I would therefore be keen to meet other LGBT people in other social contexts.”

Access to Services

In terms of accessing services, many consultation event participants expressed real concerns and fears of not being able to be themselves and having to hide who they are, both in the present and in the future.

The survey found that where respondents used services, only 62% were out to their GP, 61% to mental health services, 50% to other health services, 49% to (non LGBT) voluntary sector services, 43% to social services and 42% to housing providers.

“I have to be careful with my gay issues because it can get very difficult to be ostracised in sheltered housing.”

“I go to a GP’s surgery and look at the posters and think ‘where are we?’ It makes me reluctant to come out – he (the GP) doesn’t know I’m gay – he might be OK, but what if he wasn’t?”

“I want open affirmation of my identity when dealing with public services.”

Concerns About Ageing

The consultation highlighted significant concerns around ageing. While responses largely show similar concerns expressed by men and women, twice as many women are concerned about finances. Responses from transgender people show significantly higher levels of concern across the board.

“My wish would be to remain in my own home. Be independent. It means people who are supporting me need to understand my needs and being gay is one of them.”

KEY CONCERNS ABOUT AGEING

- 45% expressed fears around loneliness (42% men, 46% women, 57% transgender respondents)
- 40% concerned about lack of opportunity to meet other LGBT people
- 31% concerned about financial worries (20% men, 38% women, 71% of transgender respondents)
- 27% concerned about the need to use social services (23% men, 28% women, 57% transgender).

"I feel that doors close to me because of my age."

"I have a concern – it's other people living in that environment (care homes). Professionals are bound to behave in a certain way but other people might not behave in the same way."

"I worry about being alone... by the time I lose my faculties who will be there for me? I don't have children."

Access to Information

The top information needs identified were:

- Ageing issues affecting LGBT people (54%)
- Physical and mental health (53%)
- Legal rights, finances and pensions (51%)
- Issues affecting older LGBT people using mainstream services (49%)
- Community safety and hate crime (38%).

"Information on residential care, as we need gay provision."

"Legal information – things can get hard as we get old – especially if family don't know about us – they can make things difficult..."

Conclusion

The consultation evidenced a strong need for social connection in the 50+ LGBT community. Despite significant legislative and attitudinal change, many older LGBT people are not out, or out only selectively. Aging creates many unique barriers for older LGBT people, particularly in accessing health and social care services, and in finding welcoming spaces; the barriers for transgender people are even more significant.

The consultation resulted in a successful application to the Big Lottery Fund for a three-year LGBT Age Project designed to reduce isolation and increase resilience, in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Lothians. The project offers befriending and a programme of social events and information sessions.

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