

LGBT Mental Health Empowerment Project Impact report November 2016



Introduction

The aim of the LGBT Mental Health Empowerment Project [MHEP] was to provide space for LGBT people with lived experience to explore the impact of stigma and what actions can be taken to combat mental health stigma. This 6-month project, funded by See Me, delivered group sessions and hosted a film and discussion event between August and October, 2016.

Working in partnership with mental health and arts organisations, including the Scottish Queer International Film Festival and Flourish House, the project provided participants with a safe space to come together, share experiences and learn skills that promoted wellbeing and resilience. It successfully raised awareness of mental health stigma among members of the LGBT community in Glasgow and surrounding areas.

Key objectives

- LGBTQI people will be more aware of the impact of stigma and how they can help support its reduction
- Individuals with lived experience will be empowered to share their experiences of mental health issues and stigma
- Participants will have a better sense of wellbeing
- Build an evidence to show how stigma affects the LGBT community



Clockwise from top left: collage session; audience watching films at the public event; tour of Kelvinhall art gallery at Moving Minds; community discussion at the public event.

“LGBT mental health is rarely discussed in public spaces - it was great to experience.”

“[this event] makes me hopeful for giving and receiving support.”

Participant feedback from the film and discussion event

Is there a need for a mental health project for LGBT people in Glasgow?

There is a strong need for a specialist LGBT mental health project in Glasgow. One in four calls for emotional support to our Scottish Helpline come from the Glasgow area. A mapping of services in Glasgow showed that there is no specialist support for LGBT adults (except through LGBT Youth for those under 26). In our 2015 Glasgow community consultation, 57% of respondents indicated they wanted specialist LGBT mental health services; 54% wanted to improve their general wellbeing; 48% wanted to share their experiences.

There is a high prevalence of poor mental health in Glasgow. Levels of poor mental health are significantly higher when compared to the rest of Scotland on a number of measures such as moderate to severe anxiety symptoms, substance misuse and suicide rates.

Individuals report a range of unmet needs such as: not accessing mental health services in relation to a long-term mental health condition due to past discrimination by mental professionals; mainstream services not feeling 'safe'; not being accepted for who they are (in relation to LGBT identity); no counsellors or counselling services stating they are 'trans inclusive'; not being able to 'come out' to GP and therefore not being able to ask for services; and judgments and assumptions from mainstream mental health providers.

57% of respondents indicated they wanted specialist LGBT mental health services

- Community consultation

Ethos and approach of the project

LGBT Health and Wellbeing promotes and facilitates opportunities to improve the social, emotional, physical and mental wellbeing of LGBT people in Scotland. Having established a solid understanding of the needs of LGBT people to improve their mental health and wellbeing and share their experiences, we carefully planned how to deliver a programme of events that was respectful, positive, and accessible for all who wanted to attend.

It was important to manage participant expectations, as the timeframe of the project was so short, and not to overpromise what we could deliver. Sessions were provided by and for community members with lived experience of mental ill health. In this short time, we hoped to equip participants with information about other mental health resources available to them, new self-management techniques, a provide opportunities to meet new people and to share their experiences.

Safe space and inclusivity

LGBT Health and Wellbeing operates a safe space commitment that informs all of our work. This is an agreement about how we treat each other, and includes a commitment to avoid making assumptions about people, not to judge others and to respect each other's boundaries. Given the focus on mental health and wellbeing, facilitators emphasised the importance of looking after ourselves and others in the space, confidentiality and respect. Participants were encouraged to

take part only as much as was comfortable. There was a quiet space in which participants could take time away from the activity or event at any point.

At LGBT Health and Wellbeing we welcome the entire diversity of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, non-binary, queer, intersex and asexual communities and allies. Our services and activities are for all people aged 16+. This includes those who are questioning their sexual orientation and/or gender identity and those who do not use labels for either.

Accessibility

Disabled people experience further barriers to LGBT mental health provision, so it was important that our venues were as accessible as possible. Apart from the first group meeting, all of the venues were wheelchair accessible. The film and discussion event was also subtitled and had BSL interpretation.



Evidence gathering for future service provision

The project was designed to provide as much info as possible about creating a service for the future, by trying out particular activities and gathering in-depth information about what the community wants from LGBT Health and Wellbeing.

Working in partnership

The project worked with a number of organisations to deliver this project. Flourish House, a clubhouse for people with mental health difficulties, were extremely supportive and immediately understood the value of a space for LGBTQI people to talk about their mental health. They allowed us to use their space and promoted the group within their organisation. Scottish Queer International Film Festival (SQIFF) co-hosted the film and discussion event. They helped publicise the event widely within the LGBTQI community.

The Mental Health Network attended one of the sessions and provided support and advice around contributing to a consultation and understanding the new proposed mental health vision for Scotland. They were enthusiastic to support the work. LifeLink is a mental health organisation in Glasgow that offer one-to-one counselling, courses and group support. A counsellor from LifeLink visited the group and delivered a mindfulness taster session. Voices of Experience (VoX), a user-led organisation for people with mental health issues, gave us information and support and introduced us to their Moving Minds event as part of the Scottish Mental Health Arts and Film Festival.

Programme of events

The project programmed 6 fortnightly evening sessions and one weekend trip. Participants were invited to attend as many or as few sessions as they wanted. In October 2016, we held a film and discussion event in partnership with the Scottish Queer International Film Festival. Each of the fortnightly sessions was a chance to try an activity around the promotion of mental health and self-management skills. These were chosen by participants at the first meeting.



Introduction to the project and planning session

The first meeting was a chance to meet each other and share suggestions for the project and future meetings. This session shaped the programme of activities and discussion, and the focus of the public event.

Describe your experience of the project in 3 words

Writing for Mental Health

Due to popular demand, two writing sessions were held, facilitated by community member Elaine Gallagher. Aimed at all abilities and confidence-levels, the sessions were encouraging and free of criticism. In short exercises focused on writing for mental health, participants wrote their thoughts, feelings and perspectives.

Reassuring,
welcoming,
interesting.

Meeting the Mental Health Network and consultation response

One of the areas of interest flagged up in the planning meeting was advocacy, campaigning and policy work. For this session, participants met the Mental Health Network, who introduced them to their work and presented the Scottish Government's 10 Year Vision for Mental Health. The group co-wrote a response to the consultation on their 10-year vision, from the perspective of LGBT people with lived experience.

Empowering
for me

Collage session

This session was led by an artist with lived experience making collage birds. It was a chance to play and create with different materials, and to practice art as self-care. Participants fed back that this session provided a relaxing, grounding and safe space, in which they felt calm and peaceful.

'Moving Minds' weekend trip

The group went on a trip to Kelvingrove Art Gallery, to visit Moving Minds, a celebration of diversity and wellbeing, put on by Voices of Experience (VoX) as part of the Scottish Mental Health Arts and Film Festival (SMHAFF). We went on a tour of the gallery, enjoyed music and dance, and spoke to VoX members.

Mindfulness session with LifeLink

This taster session, aimed at beginners, was led by a mindfulness counsellor from LifeLink. The session comprised short exercises and reflective discussion, and participants left with a few new relaxation techniques.



“Pull Yourself Together”: Film and discussion night

LGBT Health, in partnership with the Scottish Queer International Film Festival, presented a collection of short films in which people share their stories of diagnosis, discrimination, funding cuts, relationships, self-care, stigma, and everyday life. After, we had a community discussion, led by participants of the MHEP, where we discussed mental health stigma in the LGBTQI community.

Many members of the community spoke up about their own experiences of mental ill health, how their gender and sexuality fit in, and of the barriers they’ve faced in accessing support. The event was fully booked 2 days in advance, and attendees spoke of the need for more events focused on talking about mental health.

Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation was embedded in the project from the outset and ongoing throughout. The first meeting was a group planning session, and the last meeting included an evaluation session. Each session was evaluated to learn participants’ thoughts and whether they felt the session had had any impact on their mental health and wellbeing. This allowed us to ‘check in’ and make adjustments on the way, to be sure that we were meeting both the project outcomes and participant expectations.

We gathered evidence to show how stigma affects the LGBT community: The group’s collective consultation response to the Scottish Government’s draft mental health strategy captured complex, nuanced insights into LGBT people’s diverse experiences of mental health stigma. The extract below highlights the different mental health needs that older and younger LGBT people may have:

There is an emphasis [in the government’s strategy] on prevention and wanting to reach out to young people but what’s missing is [an understanding of] how things were done differently in different generations. Trans just wasn’t brought up back in the day in our generations. As a result, there are many people who have learned to suppress their identities and **there is a lack of awareness of how to support older people** who have suppressed something all of their lives...”

Through discussion and participant feedback, information was gathered about how LGBT people feel that stigma can be tackled within mental health services, including:

- Services embedded within the social community so that LGBT can feel safe
- Mental health services that treat LGBT people as a whole person.
- Recognise the specific needs of the LGBT Community

The project raised awareness of mental health stigma within the LGBT community: The public event raised awareness of mental health issues within the LGBT community and gave participants a chance to discuss their stories and opinions as a community.

LGBT people with lived experience were empowered to share their experiences, and reported a positive impact on their mental health and wellbeing

Beneficiaries reported that they felt safe to share their experiences and, through participating in the group sessions and listening to others, felt less isolated, reporting “I felt less alone in my experience”, and that the most enjoyable aspect of the project was “seeing so many people who are LGBT that have mental health difficulties come together.”

Diversity and Demographics

There were **126** beneficiaries (86 unique) of the project: **41** individuals attended the fortnightly sessions, and **61** individuals attended the event.

The majority of beneficiaries came from Greater Glasgow and Clyde (**82%**).

Beneficiaries were distributed amongst all age groups, from under 17 to over 65, with the majority (**55%**) aged between 18 and 35.

24% of participants identified as ‘male’, **38%** as female, and **25%** identified out with this binary.

92% of beneficiaries identified as white.

47% of participants identified as having a disability. **94%** said they have ever had a mental health problem, and **48%** said they had experienced discrimination because of their mental health problem.

How did the sessions impact on your mental health and wellbeing?

Just another thing to help me stay afloat.

grounding, focus, sense of calm

It has provided a safe, quiet space to interact with people.

Something I will get out of the house for and reduces stress.

