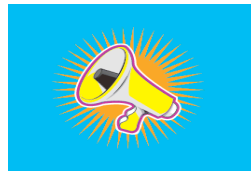


Report of the North Wales Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Forum

Speak-Easy event

hosted by Stonewall Cymru and the
West Rhyl Young People's Project

held on 26th November 2007 in the Pavillion Theatre Rhyl



A North Wales LGB Forum Speak Easy event was held at the end of November 2007 for service providers to consult local lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people. Stonewall Cymru worked in partnership with the West Rhyl Young People's Project to organise the event, which was funded as the culmination of the *Inside-Out Project*.

"So often lesbian, gay and bisexual people feel that their needs are overlooked or misunderstood by those with the power to plan how local services are delivered. The Speak Easy event will provide a unique opportunity for LGB people to share their opinions and experiences with such a range of decision makers and service planners from across the six counties of North Wales. We are laying on free minibuses to help LGB people to get to the Pavilion Theatre in Rhyl from Wrexham, Llangollen, Bangor, Llandudno and Flint and there will be free food and entertainment, so it should be a good night." – (Press Release 20/11/08)

Participants were asked:

- 1. What were their experiences of being lesbian, gay or bisexual in their local authority?**
- 2. How services could be improved for LGB people in their area?**
- 3. What are the best ways of communicating with local LGB people?**

The following recommended actions would help to correct existing conditions and improve relations between LGB people and local authorities and service providers. It is important to note that there are only a few LGB groups / organisations in North Wales and so it is essential to focus communication directly to LGB individuals.

Recommendations

We recommend that local authorities and service providers:

- 1. Demonstrate a welcome to LGB people using your services** – use images to reflect the fact that same-sex sexual orientation is a part of society. Encourage the development of public champions, role models and LGB staff networks within the service workforce.
- 2. Proactively engage LGB people in further consultation** – hold regular Speak Easy events and publicise responses to the consultations.
- 3. Provide support for the development of local LGB peer-support** and social groups and the provision of safe spaces.

Background

Citizen engagement through consulting and actively engaging citizens in policy-making is key to the Welsh Assembly Government's *Making the Connections* strategic agenda, but accessing and communicating with citizens within the 'hard to reach' equality strands can be difficult. Lesbian, gay and bisexual people (people with same-sex sexual orientation) have been identified as one of the 'hard to reach' equality strands. LGB people are absent from the Census as a 'population group' and their needs are all too often overlooked in the design and delivery of public services. Stonewall Cymru works to address these difficulties through research evidence and the development of regional LGB forums to create an access point for engagement with the statutory sector on issues and service needs for LGB people.

During 2006-07 Stonewall Cymru developed skills and knowledge within the LGB community by teaming up with the University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN) Centre for Ethnicity and Health's Community Engagement team to bring their Community Engagement model into Wales for the first time. The aims of the *Inside-Out Project* were fully aligned with the *'Making the Connections'* 'citizen-centred services' improvement agenda.

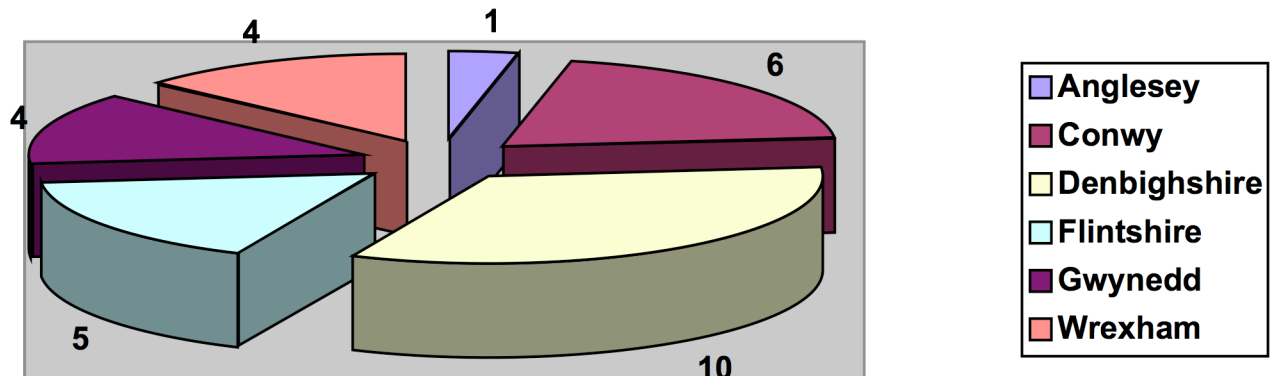
The *Inside-Out Project* recruited and trained LGB community researchers to focus on LGB people's experiences of accessing health services in North and Mid Wales and produce a Report and Recommendations for making services more appropriate and sensitive to the needs of the LGB community. The *Inside-Out Project* involved close work with local LGB groups, particularly Viva from West Rhyl Young People's Project. The Report provided vital information and feedback to commissioners of health services from a 'seldom heard' group.

Copies of the Report can be accessed at www.stonewallcymru.org.uk/cymru/english/across_wales/insideout_project/

The impact of the *Inside-Out Project* and its recommendations has been far-reaching with presentations made to North and South Wales NHS Trusts, greater consideration given to sexual orientation issues in staff training, and an increased understanding and response to the needs of LGB people both as patients and as a patient's chosen primary carer. The Welsh Assembly Government is in the process of producing a Welsh Health Circular: *Raising awareness of the needs and rights of lesbian, gay and bisexual people when accessing healthcare services in Wales* and Stonewall Cymru is aiding the distribution of the General Medical Council's leaflet *Protecting patients, your rights as lesbian, gay and bisexual people* to LGB people across Wales.

Demography of Speak Easy attendants – individuals and organisation representatives

Taken from registration forms, please note that this does not represent the total number of attendants.



Analysis of feedback

Questions considered:

1. What is your experience of being lesbian, gay or bisexual in your local authority?
2. How could services be improved for LGB people in your area?
3. What are the best ways of communicating with LGB people?

Themes & recurrent issues generated by the questions raised

Themes that emerged from both the facilitated Speak Easy and the subsequent feedback included:

- A shortage of 'safe spaces' for LGB people
- Significant variations in the in quality of Police responses
- Support needed for organisations on the effective introduction and implementation of systems for monitoring sexual orientation.
- Concern for the lack of support for LGB young people in some areas
- Local authorities could better demonstrate a commitment to improving services for LGB people by becoming Diversity Champions.
- A lack of images depicting LGB individuals and families in information, resources and public service delivery points contributes to perceptions of 'invisibility' for LGB people

- To increase access to – and uptake of – internet-related information & communication resources by LGB people, public libraries need to review 'firewall' software to remove arbitrary restrictions.
- The need for specific training for employees of service providers (including planners, managers, administration and frontline staff)
- Local Authorities could use 'mainstream' publications such as county-wide newsletters or the local press to communicate examples of best practice to the LGB population to foster confidence and trust.

Messages in a bottle:

During the event we gave participants the opportunity to write a 'message in a bottle' to the Chief Executive of their local authority and undertook to pass the messages on. Similar themes recurred in the Message in a Bottle exercise, including: training for staff of service providers, the lack of visibility of LGB people in literature and in images within resources etc. and the need for Local Authorities to sign up to becoming Diversity Champions.

Anglesey

"Are there enough lesbian and gay role models in primary and high schools like it suggests in the Stonewall Education for All document?"

Conwy

- *"Advertise Conwy (Llandudno) as a place to have your civil partnership."*
- *"Include images of gay and lesbian couples in publicity about housing, social services and community safety."*

Denbighshire

"Please can you ensure LGB people are at least mentioned in council newspapers and other communications!"

Flintshire

"Please give thought to suitable retirement accommodation i.e. nursing homes for elderly LGB people."

Gwynedd

"Why do the council's computers block access to some LGB websites? Such as Gaydar and certain 'chat rooms'?"

Wrexham

- *"Some more resources, i.e. money for equalities issues/ specialist staff re-training them! Become a Stonewall [Diversity] Champion! Show you mean it."*
- *"Sign up to Stonewall [Diversity] Champion scheme"*

To all local authorities, fire service, police, ambulance and health authority

"Please devote more resources to equality training for your staff"

Comments from participants' evaluation forms:

Comments made by participants on the supplied evaluation forms were generally positive with a large number of the respondents finding the event to have been useful. Below are direct excerpts from evaluation forms.

1. What, if anything have you found useful about this event?

"The relaxed informal atmosphere enabled people to be involved, express thoughts about a range of subjects"

"To have my opinion heard by people who can make the difference"

"Hearing from others, their aspirations and experiences – especially LGB people. A great mix of ages and issues"

2. What, if anything do you think could have been improved?

Participants that evaluated the session identified some areas for improvement: the acoustics of the venue, a shortage of time allocated for discussion, if more LGB people had been present it could have improved the discussions by making it easier to concentrate on specific geographic areas. Below are direct excerpts from evaluation forms:

"Nothing – more time to talk if anything"

"Being able to hear everything was not easy in the groups – acoustics"

"Had there been more LGB reps perhaps we could have concentrated on geographic areas"

3. Would you like to take part in similar activities on a variety of subjects in the future? What subjects would you like to see discussed?

Participants were asked if they were interested in holding other similar events in the future, the response was positive with a large percentage keen to be involved in future initiatives. Below are direct excerpts from evaluation forms:

"Yes – would like to see this as ongoing event & date to stay in touch"

"Yes – perhaps use some of the issues raised & focus on one at a time"

"Yes. Identify what local authorities are doing for LGB people, report achievements in performance"

4. Any other comments?

"I hope that the points discussed are filtered to all the authorities in North Wales"

"How often can we get together, please?!"

"Excellent, very well organised"