



LGBT Health and Wellbeing

LGBT Age

Impact Report 2014-17

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Introduction

LGBT Health and Wellbeing was set up in 2003 to promote the health, wellbeing and equality of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in Scotland. We provide support, services and information to improve the health and wellbeing, reduce social isolation and stimulate community development and volunteering.

This report shares the work of LGBT Health and Wellbeing's **LGBT Age Scotland Project**. The project, funded by BIG Lottery Fund in Scotland was delivered from 2014 to 2017 to work with LGBT people over 50 across Greater Glasgow, Edinburgh and the Lothians.

The LGBT Age Project set out to provide a range of social, support and volunteering opportunities. The project aimed to reduce the social isolation and marginalisation that LGBT people over 50 often experience. In addition, the project has also provided a strong platform for consultation and for the voices of older LGBT people to be heard in order to help counter the lack of awareness of the lived experience and needs of older LGBT people.

Two Development Workers led on delivery with additional support provided by a Project Assistant and sessional staff. A team of volunteers was established and formed an important part of the development and delivery. Overall management was provided by the LGBT Health management team.

Context: the need for LGBT Age

Older LGBT people have lived through much less tolerant times, including the criminalisation of homosexuality, the pathologising of LGBT identities and widespread lack of legal protection. Older LGBT people have to cope not just with the legacy of prolonged exposure to stigma and discrimination, but also continue to experience a relatively high level of prejudice and discrimination from their peers, as in Scotland today older people are still a section of the population that is more likely to hold discriminatory attitudes.

I feel socially awkward and generally anxious about being out because I've had such a negative reaction [from family and former friends]. Having somewhere to come where I don't feel judged, where everyone is friendly and welcoming has made such a difference to me and provided me with a reason to get out of bed in the morning. A real lifeline.

Older LGBT people face many issues in respect of aging, in common with the general older population. However they are also likely to face other issues associated with prejudice, isolation, marginalisation, invisibility and the double discrimination of ageism and homophobia / biphobia / transphobia.

The organisation's previous work with LGBT people over 50 in Edinburgh and Lothians uncovered a high level of unmet need. There has been a lack of targeted service provision for LGBT adults and this is especially true for older LGBT people who are often largely invisible and whose needs have been very overlooked.

Social isolation particularly affects older LGBT people, as they often have significantly diminished support networks when compared to the general older population: they are more likely to live alone; more likely to be single as they age; more likely to have no children; more likely to have little contact with their biological family. For those without close family, support from friends, and the creation of 'families of choice' is very important; however not all older LGBT people have these supportive networks.

I wanted to meet people who I could chat with and socialise and receive peer support from. I wanted to increase my social experience and widen my social circle to reduce isolation.

The gay commercial scene, which in our larger cities offers a chance to meet other LGBT people and safely express one's identity, is largely youth orientated and often not inclusive of older LGBT people. This means that as they age many LGBT people often feel increasingly disconnected from the wider LGBT community.

I was a full time carer – for 4 years I had been completely isolated and it felt as though my life had disappeared from me. I wasn't sure where and if I would ever get a connection back.

Coming out later in life for many has been a long and difficult period of suppressing one's sexual orientation or gender identity and hiding one's true identity. This often long and arduous journey towards self-acceptance will inevitably have had a detrimental impact on confidence, self-esteem and mental and emotional wellbeing.

Those coming out later in life often face particular challenges including negative reactions from friends and family as well as making connections with peers. In addition the wider LGBT community can itself also prove challenging, particularly given the youth orientated nature of the gay commercial scene.

Delivery model

A key aim of the project was to enable older LGBT people to grow both in terms of social connections but also to help them grow in confidence to engage with a range of services. Reduction in social isolation and growth in personal confidence have been key aims of our approach to working with people.

To respond to the acute levels of isolation and marginalisation experienced by this group the LGBT Age Project delivered the following strands of support in Glasgow and Edinburgh:

- **Befriending service:** individually tailored support to people in Lothians and Greater Glasgow to reduce isolation, improve confidence, self-esteem and mental wellbeing.
- **Social opportunities:** programme of social opportunities in Edinburgh and Glasgow to create better social connections and new relationships.
- **Information sessions:** regular workshops and events in Edinburgh and Glasgow aimed at building resilience, knowledge and confidence in accessing support services

Partnership work with mainstream services provided opportunities to highlight the discrimination and disadvantage often faced by this minority. Through partnership working together we were able support these services to look at their own inclusive practice and reach into the community.

One of the key ways that activities were promoted was through the LGBT Age e-bulletin. The e-bulletin achieved a circulation list of over 500 including individuals and community organisations. Targeted distribution of LGBT Age leaflets as well as the organisations e-bulletins, website and social media also provided opportunities to reach older LGBT people.

LGBT Health's organisation wide quarterly programme was also used to promote the range of events and befriending opportunities available. This is widely distributed across libraries, community centres, GP surgeries and third sector organisations across Glasgow and Edinburgh.

Delivery of the Befriending Service

Over the three years of the project we have engaged with over 100 individuals wanting to explore befriending and worked with over 70 volunteer befrienders.

Referrals

Referrals to the befriending service were two-fold; self referrals and professional referrals. Individuals heard about the service through a variety of methods including posters and leaflets in GP surgeries, community centres, residential care settings and the LGBT Health website.

The most common professional referrers were:

Sandyford Gender Clinic
Terence Higgins Trust
Waverley Care
Older Peoples' Social Work Departments
NHS Occupational Therapy
Residential care staff

This demonstrates the importance connecting through various networks and events and also capitalising on existing relationships to spread the word about our services. Many of the people referred to us reported having previous negative experiences of engagement with services. Individuals spoke about experiences of, or perceived fears of, homophobia and transphobia.

As the project was delivered over 3 years we had scope to build awareness and build delivery over time. As our experience of delivery developed we were able to use this to inform how to continue to shape the service and ensure that we could reach those who may be the most isolated or lacking in confidence.

Matches

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total(s)
Beneficiaries applied for befriending	28	42	72	102 individuals offered befriending support
No. of new volunteers trained and matched	9	12	49	70 volunteers
No. of befriending matches	20	10	44	74 full matches achieved



When surveyed on the effects of befriending, one beneficiary stated:

My befriender is the first person in my life who has never criticised me. I feel more confident in who I am since I started meeting him.



The Befriending Service took time to develop momentum however in its final year the service saw a marked increase in matches due to a more visible and vibrant presence both on and offline. The final year also saw a spike in volunteer recruitment with 4 volunteer training sessions being held and 44 volunteer befrienders being recruited

People who applied for a befriender met with the Befriending Co-ordinator to identify their needs and what they were looking to get out of befriending. The assessment procedure involved an initial meeting that focussed on befriender motivations, level of support already in place and what goals they hoped to achieve from a match.

Matching decisions were taken with regard to priority. Many LGBT we came into contact with wanted to seek a match from LGBT specific service. An affirmative service that was connected with a wider LGBT organisation was seen as positive and desirable even if the person had other social networks.



With the aim of our service being to reduce social isolation and improve general wellbeing, we had a waiting list of people who were severely socially isolated and struggled to maintain other contacts. We also came into contact with some people applying for a befriender who already enjoyed a vast social circle; attended all our social events; and simply wanted a befriender as something else they could access.

Any potential befrienderes who were not matched with a befriender were directed to other parts of our service. Where appropriate, individuals were also signposted to external supports that could be of use.

Befriending volunteers

Over our third year of delivery we saw a significant increase in the volunteer numbers through focussing on our recruitment strategy. An unexpected outcome of the volunteer recruitment was an increase also in befriender referrals. Having a larger pool of volunteers has also meant that we are able to provide befrienderes with very need-specific matches; for example, matching a befriender with limited English with a Spanish speaking befriender.

LGBT Health has significant experience of supporting a diverse range of volunteering opportunities. This support has been developed over many years in across many roles. The befriending service gave us the opportunity to utilise this previous volunteer management experience whilst also developing our skill in this

specific type of one to one work. Our recruitment and training systems needed to be robust and had a strong emphasis on the particular issues associated with lone working.

Although primarily working alone group support and supervision sessions were held in response to feedback from volunteers. They enjoyed the opportunity to meet regularly, to get the sense of being part of a bigger organisation and peer support.



My mental health may prevent me volunteering at times, but volunteering and my role within the LGBT Health and Wellbeing community – knowing I’m helping others – really helps my mental health.



Any potential volunteers who were not matched were sign posted to other roles. Sometimes this was within our own organisation. Reasons for volunteers not progressing to a match included a lack of understanding of the need for committing regular time, concerns around boundaries and value systems not aligning with organisational ethos.

Quality in Befriending (QiB)

The befriending service undertook the Quality in Befriending (QiB) accreditation with Befriending Networks over the course of the second year of delivery. This is the only award in the UK that is specifically tailored for befriending services.

Although an in depth process, it was in itself very valuable in reassuring us of the high standard of policy and procedure exist in the Befriending Service. The process also helped us reflect on and hone our procedures ensuring that the project achieved and continued to deliver best practice.

We were delighted to achieve the accreditation and we received recognition of our award at the Befriending Networks Annual Conference in November 2016.



Delivery of the Social Programme

The aim of the social programme was to create better social connections and new relationships. In providing information sessions and having regular workshops and events, we aimed to build individual resilience, knowledge and confidence in accessing support services.

The social opportunities have enabled older LGBT people to re-connect with peers, reduce social isolation and gain knowledge about other services. We also sought to deliver a range of information sessions to run alongside the social programme. The focus of these sessions was to introduce relevant organisations and information to people in a safe and inclusive space.

The programme has comprised of a wide range of activities such as visits to places of interest, film nights or opportunities to try activities such as creative writing.

Our approach to delivery has been strongly influenced and directed by community members through establishing a Creative Planning Group.

The **Creative Activity Planning Group** was set up to actively involved community members who take part in the LGBT Age Social Programme. The planning meetings were held quarterly in both cities and the groups helped shape the programme as well as providing a platform to review the practical aspects of delivery, such as utilising local knowledge about possible activities or services of interest. On average each meeting attracted up to 8 participants.

This approach has given community members a sense of empowerment, have their voices heard, build their confidence in taking part in group discussions and making the social programme more community led.



I wanted to be visible as a gay man and to help others be what and who they want to be. It is a fun evening and people appreciate it being there. That makes it really rewarding to be involved.



[As an older LGBT person] I wanted to put something back on a voluntary basis to an area of my life that was particularly personal.

YEAR 1 of the LGBT Age social programme focussed on building our presence with community members and other organisations to increase awareness and visibility of the new LGBT Age Project. Promotional materials were designed and widely distributed. Our initial approach to delivery was taken from the result of a community consultation that we had previously undertaken. During this year **25 social events** were delivered with **61 unique beneficiaries** often attending events for the first time. Social events was held across both Edinburgh and Glasgow with many people travelling to both locations.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS FROM YEAR 1



LGBT Age Launch event in October 2014 held at Glasgow City Chambers. This was a great success; over 40 people representing a diversity of stakeholders attended.

Getting to Know You Session – This was an opportunity for the new LGBT Age staff members to meet community members and find out what they would like to see in the social programme, find out more about the LGBT Age Project and how they can get involved.

Other events included a tour of Glasgow City Chambers; Edinburgh Festival Theatre tour and an event to mark International Older Persons Day.

By **YEAR 2** LGBT Age Project's Social Programmed began to flourish, it had continued to develop and deliver a varied programme of social events, information sessions and one to one support. User-led opportunities for involvement in the designing and delivery of the project continued to be a focus via volunteering opportunities, participating in the Creative Activity Planning meetings and the Age Reference Group. An increase in social activities of **34 events** were delivered across Edinburgh and Glasgow, **86 unique beneficiaries** were new to the social programme.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS FROM YEAR 2



Launch of Coffee Posse: Community led monthly informal social get together for LGBT people over 50 based in Glasgow city centre. From the outset this proved to be a significant and successful way of bring people together

LGBT Age and Luminate: Collaboration was established. We ran a workshop as part of the Luminate, the annual Scotland-wide Creative Aging Festival and an LGBT Age film screening and panel discussion as part of Scottish International Queer Festival. This work continued into year 3 and culminated in two Cabaret Shows delivered in conjunction with Luminate and Dive.

Scottish Parliament Tour: Event to glean information about the democratic processes in Scotland and the historical context of the Scottish Parliament. This event also appealed to those with an interest in architecture and the built environment.

Kelpies Trip: Brought together participants from Edinburgh & Glasgow to meet each other.

In **YEAR 3** LGBT Age saw a marked increase in service delivery, both in terms of the number of events and attendees. The project has had a higher profile in the LGBT community, which, through the work of the LGBT Age Reference Group, helped to ensure LGBT Age had a visible and vibrant presence at both Pride Edinburgh and Glasgow. In 2016 we were able to offer 58 social events delivered both in Edinburgh and in Glasgow. **In total 81 unique beneficiaries were new to the LGBT Age social programme.**

KEY HIGHLIGHTS FROM YEAR 3



Ride with Pride (Edinburgh/Glasgow Pride)

To celebrate LGBT older people and support their active inclusion at Pride, LGBT Age worked with community members to ensure that older LGBT people would be visible and welcomed at Glasgow and Edinburgh parades. Buses were provided for the parades and were mainly near the front of the parades.



D&G LGBT Plus road trip

Community members travelled from both Edinburgh and Glasgow to meet with the LGBT Plus D&G group and to have lunch with them. This provided an excellent opportunity for community members to meet others living in Dumfries and Galloway and vice versa. Community members shared experiences, had fun and a real sense of connection was formed.

Coffee Posse



One of the community member-led initiatives which we supported as part of this project was 'Coffee Posse', a monthly informal social get together for LGBT people over 50 that takes place in a central location in Glasgow. The impetus for this initiative was the fact that people wanted an alternative to the commercial gay scene; a social space that was not youth-orientated and did not revolve around alcohol. Instead community members wanted something that was informal and community-run, a safe, inclusive space where people could go and meet and make new friendships.

In order to enable this initiative to get off the ground, community members were invited to step forward to become volunteers, provided with volunteer induction training and supported to run the social meet up space. They encourage less confident individuals to engage with others and sharing information about other LGBT groups and events.

The initiative has proved very successful, with over **70 individuals** attending the monthly Glasgow 'Coffee Posse' social since its launch in September 2015. This has led to the launch of a similar initiative in Edinburgh. Coffee Posse in Edinburgh was launched in January 2017 with 11 people attending the first event. The monthly group continues to build momentum with new members attending and a strong commitment coming from volunteers without whom Coffee Posse would not exist.

Community members are feeling empowered, and have something to look forward. There is a strong need for this service, as there are not anything similar anywhere in Glasgow or Edinburgh.

The motivations for getting involved, as volunteers were either personal or altruistic, or some combination of the two.

Feedback from community members who have attended Coffee Posse:

I had a crisis in retirement. My job suddenly came to an end. I was a bit depressed, looking for something to do.



Chatting to other members, visited somewhere different, had a really good time.

Chatting to people, feeling of inclusion in society.

Meeting LGBT+ people who are my own age group.

Really enjoyed meeting everyone, everyone made me feel welcomed. You are all friendly and lovely, thank you for the welcome.

Delivery of the Information Sessions

Over the 3 years period, LGBT Age worked partnership with other organisations to support and deliver information sessions that community members suggested. In total **7** information sessions were delivered across Edinburgh and Glasgow and **9** unique beneficiaries attending these events. Information sessions were varied and included:

Power of Attorney Information session

Opportunity to inform community members about their legal rights and information around how to create a power of attorney.

This was an informative workshop on the power of attorney; it covered all area of concern, written handouts useful. Now will take action on this matter. Thanks.

Drink Wise, Age Well Information session

Helping people make healthier choices about their drinking as they age. This was an interactive session on alcohol awareness and healthier aging (from Drink Wise Age Well).

The session with Drink Wise, Age Well led to them providing support to continue Coffee Posse and look at some of the key issues that older LGBT people experience around alcohol.

Wasn't aware of the issues that older people experience with drink, as information is usually aimed at younger people.

Hate Crime awareness workshop

In conjunction with Glasgow Women's Library giving women the opportunity to speak about their experiences of hate, prejudice and targeted hostility in their local communities.

First time I have come along to an event like this, I found it very informative and ways to be empowered to report a hate crime. I want to get involved with the further piece of work.

Safe space to share experiences of hate crime, it made me feel I wasn't the only one who has been living in silence to a hate crime.

Involving People

LGBT Age Reference Group

The LGBT Age Reference Group was established in 2012 as part of our LGBT Age Capacity Building Project (2012-15) and was continued beyond the life of that project. The Reference Group brings older LGBT people together to address issues of concern to them. The group has not only helped shape the work of LGBT Age, but has been integral in enabling the LGBT Age Project in turn shape mainstream services, by sharing the lived experiences of older LGBT people and raising awareness of their needs.

The Reference Group provides opportunities for older LGBT people to contribute their views through consultations, and enables other organisations to hear older LGBT voices, experiences and opinions. Its members have been very committed to raising awareness and engendering change, presenting at a range of training events and conferences, collaborating on the production of the 'Are we being served?' film and contributing to the production of a suite of LGBT resources aimed at mainstream older peoples' services.

The work of LGBT Age is so vital, both in providing services and advocating of behalf of older LGBT people. It has the power to change lives and I would encourage any organisation that provides services for older people to visit their website to check out the great resources they have created.



The group is closely involved with the Scottish Older People's Assembly (SOPA), and with Edinburgh's A City for All Ages, and in these fora provides a strong voice for the concerns of older LGBT people in Scotland. One of the Reference Group's members was invited to chair the City of Edinburgh Council and NHS Lothian Checkpoint Group consulting on Edinburgh's Joint Commissioning Plan for Older People. The Reference Group also convened a public meeting for LGBT people to be able to feed into the community consultation response LGBT Age submitted.

Members have also given input on the redesign of the Care Information Scotland Service as well as meeting with representatives from Health in Mind and Silver Line Scotland thus enabling discussion to take place around how to make services inclusive for older LGBT people.

In 2016, The Reference group also worked to make Pride, a key LGBT community event more LGBT inclusive, spearheading the 'Ride with Pride' initiative. This saw us working with Pride organisers to provide a dedicated bus to enable older LGBT people, particularly those with health or mobility issues, to take part in the Pride march and celebrations held annually in Glasgow and Edinburgh. The bus, decorated with banners and balloons, enabled older LGBT people to participate and feel part of this key annual community event, including for some who were able to participate in Pride for the first time. This input has ensured that inclusion of older LGBT people continues to be an on-going priority for these annual events.



Never thought I'd be at Pride. What a great day! Enjoyed being able to sit down and stand at will, boogie with my disabled friends, and get to meet others like us. The waves from other marchers really made us feel part of the march.

Impact on individuals

Over 60% of people using LGBT Age activities reported feeling more integrated in the LGBT community and having a greater level of social interaction.

The external evaluation survey (92 respondents) found:

- 87% of those who had used LGBT Age activities had experienced a positive difference as a result of them, with 31% saying this had been 'a lot'
- 73% said that their involvement had given them a stronger foundation for the future

Our external evaluation (carried out in Dec 2016) provided strong evidence for the need for a specialist service working with older LGBT people.

The evaluation found the degree of impact was very much dependant on people's starting point, as each individual comes to the project with a different level of confidence, of existing social or family connections, of life challenges experienced in relation to their gender identity or sexual identity, or to the length of time since they have come out publicly.

Therefore some older LGBT people who had been very isolated before involvement with LGBT Age, but were now experiencing new social contact and integration into a like-minded community saw this as being essential to their survival and as the only way to fully establish their identity.

Others had a starting point of pre-existing social networks and a better level of wellbeing, but still expressed the value of being part of LGBT Age activities because of the safety, acceptance and empathy they experienced alongside opportunities for new activities.



It is specifically the acceptance of me in my preferred gender that pulls me towards this service. I don't need to spend more time in groups where I feel the odd one out!



I don't know of any services that exist [for older LGBT people] or might understand the challenges LGBT Age participants face. General services for older people can be homophobic without intending to be.

The external evaluation identified the following impact of LGBT Age on individuals

Comfort/ Empathy	Safety/ Acceptance	Empowering identity	Improving networks and relationships	Enabling recovery	Essential for survival
A welcome, warmth and understanding borne out of a common experience (even within the diverse experience of the LGBT community).	A space where people know they do not have to explain themselves and they are safe from negative, hurtful or prejudicial comments experienced in other settings in life.	Enabling people to fully feel and act as themselves, so experiencing a more complete identity than they are able to with non-LGBT people and in other settings	Offering LGBT people contact with others in the LGBT community which leads to increased companionship and social opportunities	Supportive conversations, peer understanding, and positive relationships which restore confidence and sometimes support people to address issues which have been negative or damaging	Countering a life of severe isolation where a lack of supportive relationships can significantly harm mental health, to the extent for some, of suicidal thoughts

Acceptance. That’s a good word for it. It’s 100% here.

I had a deep down yearning [to be honest at work]. It’s exhausting having to cover that up.

LGBT Age sought to achieve a number of key outcomes. As a result of their involvement with the project we wanted older LGBT people to have:

- Developed new and improved social connections
- Reduced their social isolation
- Improved their personal wellbeing
- Built stronger foundations for independent living

Our own **annual feedback survey** (carried out in Nov 2016) was completed by 65 people using the LGBT Age project. It indicated key impacts of the project, including:

- 84% of felt that as a result of engagement with the project they were more able to say about things that affect them
- 81% were more aware of services that could support them
- 81% were more confident and able to seek support
- 80% of respondent reported they were more connected to their community
- 73% of respondents reported that were less lonely

My befriender supports me a lot, I couldn’t manage without him. I used to isolate myself out of fear but now I’m more comfortable. I never felt like I belonged anywhere before this. Now I feel less confused and art of something.

Slowly through that (befriending) I thought I can make a connection to social things. If I can do that, then I thought I could go to things through LGBT Age social outings. Like Summerly - I would never have done that on my own, even if I'd known about it, which I didn't.

This was one of the few contacts with her LGBT identity where she felt comfortable. Lately we went out shopping and she was fully dressed - she's a trans lady. I was dropping her off and asked how she felt being in town and she said she hadn't even thought about it. When I first started, this was such an uncomfortable thing - it was much more awkward and scary for her.

I had a stroke last year - it knocked my confidence although I'd previously been involved in lots of different things - I thought about a befriender to get me back on the horse if you like. He helped me look at new interests and revisit old ones.

CASE STUDY: JOHN

My befriender is Guillermo. He has been doing a fantastic job. It's been a pleasure having a befriender and having contact with LGBT people. I suffer from Parkinsons and Lewy Body dementia, which means I am housebound. I'm 62, going on 25 and I live in sheltered accommodation. I don't like being surrounded by old people, I don't see myself as old.

I was a fashion designer, and have lived all over the world – mostly in Holland and Thailand. I have also written 5 books, and have a few more still to publish. I can't concentrate for very long these days though, because of combination of Parkinsons and Lewy Body Dementia I am unable to take traditional medications. Before I had a befriender, I hadn't had any contact with anyone other than nurses for a few years.

Guillermo has been helping with a memory book, the object being that when my memory, Parkinson's and my dementia gets worse I will have these books. It's quite work intensive. I cannot use my right hand and my eyes are bad, so it's great having Guillermo's help. Without him I would not have been able to make the book.

Guillermo has been a great help with working the computer and printer. Evidence suggests that making the memory book can help with my memory. I had also no contact with any LGBT people so it's nice to chat and exchange stories. Guillermo makes me feel like the stories I have to tell are worth telling, and he enjoys hearing about them – and I enjoy hearing about the culture of youth that he is part of.

Having a befriender has helped with my mental health as I got so depressed and lonely. It's made me feel more confident and worth something. I look forward to Guillermo's visits as it takes my mind off my serious health problems. When I was diagnosed, my friends and family deserted me so I like having a befriender.

VOLUNTEER CASE STUDY: GUILLERMO (John's befriender)

I moved to the UK from Spain a few years ago, and I started volunteering with LGBT Health because this is something we do not have in my country and it interested me a lot. I thought that it would be nice to give something back to the community. After what happened in Orlando I thought that I had to do more and be more involved. Befriending appealed to me because I wanted to make a difference to someone, and it made me sad to think of people who are alone.

With my befriender, mostly we have been working on a photo album and memory book, as he has dementia and wants to be able to remember things in the future. He has lived all over the world and had many adventures, and we are capturing those in albums and books. He has photographs and stories and mementos and I help him put this all together.

The best thing about befriending is seeing how happy John is when we complete bits of the album, or how thankful he is when I go visit him.

I get a lot out of helping others and learning about John's life, about all that he has done and how different things were in the past or in different countries. I have learned a lot from him; he has taught me many things and there are many more to come.

The **Befriending Service** attracted far more male identified people than female and non-binary, which goes against the trend of mainstream befriending services which tend to find more females approach services for befriending support.

Many of our gay and bisexual male beneficiaries tell us that they would not have used a non LGBT service for a variety of reasons. Due to being born and raised at a time when it was illegal in the UK to be gay, many of our beneficiaries have never formally 'come out'. They may have experienced relationships and frequented LGBT venues - however we are told that *'just finding the words'* can be a massive challenge to overcome. This is something it's felt a non LGBT service would not necessarily understand. Another reason gay and bisexual men gave for not using a non LGBT service is the fear of stigma and discrimination.

In many cases, this is due to very real experiences of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia that people have experienced in their life. Due to the service being delivered by a LGBT organisation, confidence is high that volunteers will be trained to understand the issues and be able to provide a safe and supportive environment to come to, be themselves and seek support.

Having a befriender means I have purpose to go out. There is no one in my sheltered housing complex that I can call a friend and I feel unable to share my sexual orientation as this may lead to being excluded or judged and further isolated.

My befriender has allowed me to be who I really am. I have no one else since my wife died and I can go days without speaking to anyone, which makes our meetings really important to me.

Impact of volunteering

In addition to paid staff the LGBT Age project also benefitted significantly from the involvement of a large number of committed volunteers, many of whom are older LGBT people themselves. Volunteers have been at the core of delivery and their motivations to get involved and support others have been central to how we deliver this service. At the point of getting involved in the project many volunteers stated their motivations for wanting to get involved were associated with giving back to the LGBT community and wanting to make a difference in someone's life. Many of our volunteers also had key secondary motivations around '*meeting new people*' and '*meeting like minded people*'.



It's very much a two way thing.

I've learned a lot - it's stimulating - interesting - helping him is helping me.

We learn from each other. I definitely learn a lot from my befriender that I wouldn't from someone my own age.

We have enjoyed seeing volunteers develop friendships through the social programme and befriending. Volunteer (group) supervision and training sessions have provided a good platform for people to come together as well as to share practice and to feel they are contributing to something bigger. Volunteers commented on these opportunities as "nice to feel part of something bigger, when we're working by ourselves usually."

VOLUNTEER CASE STUDY: SOCIAL PROGRAMME

I started volunteering for LGBT Age in Glasgow about a year ago. I was very excited about an LGBT Age project in Glasgow as without an LGBT centre we hadn't had an LGBT focal point for years. I first volunteered at Coffee Posse, greeting people. For new members coming for the first time a nice welcome is really important! Apart from serving teas and coffees, chatting to attendees, I help with the paperwork – feedback forms and future suggestions - and making people aware of what else is going on.

Gradually, I've become more involved with the Social Programme attending and supporting events ranging from a visit to the Burrell Collection in Glasgow to a trip to the Botanic Gardens in Edinburgh. We arrange to meet up with attendees, socialise at the event and make sure people are comfortable with their trip home after the event, which is important because some people travel a long way to come to these events.

I also help plan future events through the Creative Planning Group, where feedback forms have been crucial in organising a well-rounded Social Programme. Apart from the fun of attending events, I have met many great new people and been able to use my personal social organisation skills to help develop an interesting and inclusive Social Programme. My mental health may prevent me volunteering at times, but volunteering and my role within the LGBT Health and Wellbeing community – knowing I'm helping others – really helps my mental health. Long may it continue!

The external evaluation found that volunteers involved in both the social programme and the befriending project had found a niche where they were able to contribute support to a community they felt was important, while benefiting themselves, sometimes unexpectedly from the contribution they made, from the relationships they had developed and from learning about other people's lives. Volunteers were clearly strongly committed to providing the support they believed was needed by older LGBT people.

VOLUNTEER CASE STUDY: BEFRIENDER

I decided to become a befriender with LGBT Age for a number of reasons:

(a) I was looking for something positive and constructive to do in my retirement, that as well as helping others would bring me into contact with other people.

(b) I am fortunate, as a gay man, in being confident in my sexuality and wanted to share this, and other interests, with like-minded others, to encourage them, if they wanted to, to feel more positive about themselves.

(c) I was keen to support and contribute to the gay community in the West of Scotland and play a small part in increasing its visibility.

My befriender and I meet weekly to socialise and chat, and also periodically visit tourist attractions such as museums, exhibitions, art galleries, concerts, cinema and theatre. A guiding principle here is that I am always "befriender-led", so the suggestions for doing things should come from him and be mutually agreed, with flexible arrangements.

I enjoy most the reciprocal feeling of having a constructive and positive exchange. It is very much a "two-way process", quickly settled down to a regular meeting in a consistent time-slot, and is felt by both of us to be mutually beneficial.

Positives for me in befriending is the feeling that I am doing something useful, and countering some of the ageism which can sometimes be found in some aspects of the `gay scene`. Helping my befriender to grow in confidence and self-assurance, and trying to improve the quality of life for both of us.

For the right person, who genuinely wants to help, I would definitely recommend befriending - they should also be in no doubt of the commitment that it involves, and that even at the best of times there may be some ups and downs. It is an important and meaningful thing, and if it is to be successful, cannot be undertaken lightly.

I think it very important that resources are found to sustain such a service long-term, since many of the people who come forward may be vulnerable in a number of respects, and need to be consistently supported.

As well as the positive effects on self esteem, mental health and general feeling of wellbeing for the befriendees, our external evaluation also picked up some interesting findings about peer support and the emergence of an intergenerational element in matches with younger befrienders; these matches proved very successful. Some common stories are befrienders assisting befriendees with technical tasks such as setting up email or finding their way around a smart phone or tablet. These intergenerational matches have also proved beneficial to younger befrienders who reported they had learnt a lot from their befriendees about the history of the LGBT community. It was important for the befriendees to be able to pass on this oral history,

and the volunteers learned more about the past culture of the LGBT community; the culture their befriendeds grew up in. Volunteers also reported learning about bigger world views through their befriendeds – about travel, pop culture etc. The befriendeds enjoyed being able to acknowledge and celebrate these things.



I thought ‘this is a ‘no no’’. They’re much younger than I am. I was so wrong – it changed my mind about young people. I thought I’d see it through – I’m glad I did. I talked her down before I met her – I realise that I was talking rubbish. I’ve had much more than I was hoping to get – I’ve given her so much praise.

We learn from each other – I definitely learn a lot of stuff from [befriended] that I wouldn’t from someone my own age.

I met this amazing person who has been through a lot in her life and her experiences are quite incredible – it’s being able to learn something from someone older – it almost replacing family who don’t live here – it’s very enriching.

We have a particular shared experience of LGBTQI life and "history" and understand the struggles that we have been through in a way that younger generations do not: and it's important to be able to relate to peers.



Partnership working

As well as the overall delivery of the Befriending Service and Social Programme we have also sought to develop partnerships with a wide range of individuals and organisations. The voices and experience of older LGBT people were at the centre of the project as we wanted to provide a platform to raise awareness of the needs of older LGBT people thus promoting greater inclusion both within the LGBT community and more widely in services working with older people.

We know from the Equality Report that 25% of LGBT people in Scotland have experienced discrimination or ‘less good treatment’ when using services, including 21% in our healthcare services and 11% from police services. We know that in spite of significant health inequalities and a greater need for services, poor past experience of services can make LGBT people more reluctant to use those services in future or to maintain contact with services and seek care and support in a timely manner. Therefore it was important that the project could act as a vital bridge to linking people into mainstream services as well as raising awareness of the experience of older LGBT people.

Collaborative LGBT Cabaret Project



A recent larger scale collaborative project has been our work with Luminate, Scotland's creative ageing festival, to deliver the LGBTI Cabaret Project. The project involved a series of 12 workshops for older LGBT people leading to a public cabaret performance scheduled as part of LGBT History Month (February 2017). This year's History Month theme was heritage, which resonated with participants, who explored their own stories of coming out, fear of the unknown, struggles with acceptance and inclusion through music, poems, stories and dance.

LGBT Age staff promoted the project, were on hand during the workshops and supported participants throughout. The cabaret evening in Glasgow's Tron Theatre was affirmative, empowering and well received; for many participants it was their first time performing in public. On the night, a total of 15 community members participated either in the performance itself or behind the scenes, with more engaging in the workshops. Media – Co-op filmed the process from the beginning of the project until the performance, with many participants interviewed about the impact the cabaret project had on them. It was clear early on that the group were bonding, that people were very supportive of each other and friendships were being formed. This was a very encouraging impact, as many of the participants were quite socially isolated, so making new friends proved really positive.

Both Luminate and ourselves are acutely aware of how crucial the support LGBT Age staff provided to the project was, both in terms of our community reach (which enabled effective promotion), but importantly in supporting community members to participate. Many struggled with issues of confidence, low mood and isolation and needed support to sustain their engagement.

The project has been deemed such a success, both in terms of impact on participants as well as the audience's response, that a second performance is now scheduled in Edinburgh's Traverse Theatre. Also, LGBT Health and Luminate are planning a further collaborative project around the experiences and lives of older LGBT people. Both organisations are keen to collaborate on a further project that explores awareness raising and the role of the arts might play in challenging discrimination (and fear of discrimination) towards LGBT people in care homes for older people. To that aim, Luminate have already started preliminary discussions around taking the performance into care homes with both artists and service providers. Given the invisibility of LGBT people and their lives in care settings we think this has tremendous potential. It also constitutes a strong fit with our LGBT Age capacity building work.

The result of the 12 workshops, that blossomed into a series of highly individual and ensemble pieces which reflect our own experiences, and our joint and common LGBT history. For me, what emerged early on in the workshops was the breadth of experiences, which people were bringing to the workshops. The diversity of people's backgrounds and particularly the hugely interesting and often enormously painful life events that many were bringing to the narrative of our shared LGBT experiences. It was the trust that we found in each other that allowed these stories to be told through music, song, poetry, movement and narrative.

It's nearly a year since I saw the Cabaret Callout in the Luminate 2016 Brochure. Nervously I made the two-hour journey to Glasgow and joined a group of about thirty LGBTQ people for the initial meeting. From the moment I walked in, I felt safe, supported and more "Out" than I'd been for many years! [. . .] As a direct result, and because I enjoyed it so much, I have decided to create my own show, telling my own story. I also went to Pride for the first time in twenty-three years, because I felt much more comfortable with who I am after this experience. I have been more open with friends and talked about things I couldn't have done a year ago.

Organisational learning

As well as the individual outcomes mentioned previously participants involved with LGBT Age expressed

- **A greater willingness to get involved.** *'Being able to go out on my own to meet people I have never met before - I would never have done that in the past.'*
- **A greater confidence in tackling new activities.** *'I've got more confidence in pursuing interests that have gone unexplored for too long.'*
- **Having strengthened social networks.** *'I have made several new friendships.'*

Achieving community reach

The challenge of establishing a service in a new geographical areas was also a key area of learning for the organisation. We had to reach those who were the most isolated and therefore in the greatest of need.

Delivering a Befriending Service alongside a Social Programme was a positive factor for some people who benefitted from using both elements of the project and thus increasing overall impact to the individual.

The Befriending Service was over time was able to attract many beneficiaries who hadn't previously engaged with either our organisation, or with LGBT Age social events. Those unable to attend events and activities on their own were individuals who most commonly had anxiety caused by prolonged social isolation. When accompanied by a befriender, people often felt more able to attend events.

Slowly through (befriending) I thought I can make a connection to social things. If I can do that, then I thought I could go to things through LGBT social outings – I would have never done that on my own, even if I had known about it, which I didn't!

I learned things and went to things that I wouldn't have on my own, I wouldn't have went through the door on my own. I got to meet people and feel normal. It's given me confidence to put myself out there.

Overcoming barriers to engagement

Our delivery showed that individuals often experience high levels of anxiety caused as a result of social isolation. Despite some of the beneficiaries self-referring to the befriending service, going through the assessment procedure was rarely an easy task. Many people required a lot of support to enable them to get to the stage where they felt comfortable meeting a potential befriender.

Several befriendees used the term *'neutral ground'* in reference to requesting a meeting outwith our offices. Occasionally this reflected the befriendees' fears of professional involvement, having had negative experiences with other service providers in the past.

Often the befriendees' anxieties about initial meetings were also based on inner conflict; many of the people requesting a befriender had never formally 'come out' to anyone before, or talked in any great detail about

feelings they'd kept secret for a long time. There was anxieties about how much they'd have to say; about facing this 'head on'; and for some people this took a lot of courage to overcome. We made it clear from the outset that this was a safe and supportive environment, where the befriender only ever had to share what they felt comfortable with – and that with any relationship, trust was something that would be earned over time and not expected on a first meeting.

Social Isolation and negative past experiences were significant barriers for many people we came into contact with. Our approach and ethos of going at the pace of the individual was important as was building trust and confidence. The emphasis on a creating a safe inclusive space was also important for people to address social anxiety and helping people step out of their comfort zone.

Befriendees reported that the reason they felt more able to approach our service, despite the anxiety and inner conflict, was because it was an LGBT service and because of our approach to creating a safe space.

" I enjoyed talking and listening and discussing coming out. I really appreciated the space to talk about coming out, very supportive, informative and relaxed space. "

" It was very open and informative, very relaxing and supportive; it made me think its ok to be me, no pressure. "

CASE STUDY: MARY (Befriending Service)

I live in Musselburgh and was born and bred here. I had a partner for 19 years, and then 4 years ago we broke up. I just took to my house, I knew it was time now for me to get out again. I kept myself to myself and all my friends moved away so I don't have any friends here. I phoned LGBT because I wanted to do the events but I can't go on my own. I felt alone, I just wanted to make some friends.

I have had Lupus for 2 and a half years. It's destroyed my life. I have no short term memory, and I forget what I'm saying during a sentence. I sleep for 16/17 hours a day sometimes and I don't like to go places I don't know because of my memory and anxiety with the Lupus. I worked for the blood transfusion service for 19 years, I loved that job and felt like a good member of society.

I got my befriender called Laura, and the first few times we met up at a coffee shop. Laura was interested in me and wanted to help me get friends, I haven't had anyone be interested in what I had to say for a very long time.

Now I have managed along to lots of the LGBT events, the Age. In addition, I've met some friends, not just in Edinburgh. I met (a friend) from Glasgow and now she drives over to have lunch with me once a week. I meet other people at the events and having Laura with me makes me feel comfortable, she introduced me and started conversations, I didn't feel anxious.

Having Laura as a befriender has helped me from having no one to having regular things to do and people to talk to. I can't really remember being the person I was before this, I just remember being sad.

CASE STUDY: SYD (Beneficiary of the Social Programme)

I first got in contact with LGBT Age Project back in 2015. I had a befriender to help me settle into the social events. I now regard the people at the LGBT Age as friends. Every time there is an event, I am there, because I feel safe with people who attend the events. I found my place as I always look forward to the next event or social activity. I attend the Coffee Posse because I can meet with people my own age, and usually I find things that I can relate. My first Coffee Posse was the 17th December 2015 and I still attend as I enjoy the company. I've got to meet lots of people who otherwise I would have not had the chance to meet."

If it wasn't for the LGBT Age Project in Glasgow I would be lost, a ship without a rudder, wandering aimlessly about, trying to fit in with other social groups and most likely not to fit in as usual.

I truly can't thank LGBT Age enough for giving me a place in society.

Ongoing need

In terms of need, 95% of the external evaluation respondents believed that it was important to have LGBT-specific activities. People believed that the loss of LGBT Age activities would be harmful for people individually in terms of personal wellbeing and loneliness going into older age, and would also mean that the next generation of older people were left without support as they aged.

Respondents told us the following about the prospect of the LGBT Age programmes no longer being available:

I would be closed in again. I would be quite isolated. This is an opening into another part of my life - a part that was closed up for such a long time. Here they see you and don't see you as anything else and judge you for that. And to not be judged - that's what the safe space is.

[The loss of this project] would leave people stranded again. Draw back into isolation and suffering from depression - stuck in the house most of the time - it would put people into a downward spiral - they'd withdraw themselves from the community. It's unhealthy - it would knock their confidence way back.

It would be a disaster. It would leave a big gap in people's lives - even if Coffee Posse is only once a month it's something to look forward to - and you can lift a phone and speak to somebody if you need more support.

If LGBT Age disappeared it would be very bad for me. Without the support it provides we are talking about a lot of health issues for people across the whole spectrum - drug addiction, alcoholism - it's never easy being different.

Whilst the project has been successful in delivering across the central belt, throughout the life of the project we continued to receive enquiries from older LGBT people who were geographically further afield and were often further isolated due to financial restrictions, mobility issues or lack of public transport to enable them to engage in planned activities.

The group discussion and some individual interviews carried out as part of the external evaluation identified how the wider context has changed for the LGBT community in recent years, with a greater level of acceptance, changes in legislation and improvements in rights. However, the follow up comment across the board was that whilst things have evolved for the better, any presumption that 'everything is all right now' is incorrect and the need for support is still very strong both for those who lived through more challenging times and to ensure that the next generation do not have that negative experience.

I feel that older LGBT people are more isolated, and have been more isolated during their lives due to social stigma and a general lack of acceptance than their younger counterparts have. The commercial scene is geared to younger people where older people are not always made to be part of the group. Older services give me the opportunity to mix with my peer group and I feel less like an outsider.

We have a particular shared experience of LGBTQI life and "history" and understand the struggles that we have been through in a way that younger generations do not: and it's important to be able to relate to peers.

LGBT Health's engagement with older people is a really central strand of our work, and importantly it is work that no-one else is doing in Scotland.

This project was made possible by 3-year funding from:



LGBT Health is very keen for the momentum and community engagement the project has now achieved, with a very hidden and seldom reach section of the LGBT community, not to be lost and is committed to building on this success of this project.

From July 2017 The Scottish Government has agreed 3 year funding for the LGBT Age project. This new funding comes from the Equality Unit's Promoting Equality and Cohesion Fund and will enable us to continue to deliver social activities and support to individuals in Edinburgh and Glasgow, as well as to raise awareness of the experiences and needs of LGBT people as they age.

Further Information

For more information about this project contact or any other aspect of our work please contact

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