



# LGBT Health and Wellbeing Annual Report 2018-19



Promoting the health, wellbeing and  
equality of LGBT people in Scotland

[www.lgbthealth.org.uk](http://www.lgbthealth.org.uk)

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# Foreword

This has been another busy year that has seen significant growth and development for us. We are pleased to report that once again we have engaged with people from across the LGBT+ community and from across the life course.

We're proud that we have been able to launch two new projects as part of our work with older people. Our new, and ground-breaking, LGBT Dementia Project works to increase understanding of the issues faced by LGBT people affected by dementia. Our LGBT Age Community Action Project works to empower LGBT people aged 65 and over to identify and address community issues that are important to them. As part of this project we've continued our collaboration with Luminate; this time working on a film project focused on the topic of care and older LGBT people.

We would like to pay credit to our amazing staff, volunteers, and board members for their tremendous commitment to supporting Scotland's LGBT community. It is thanks to their effort and dedication that over the last year we have been able to further expand our reach and continue to provide an excellent service for the community.

The organisation has now established our See Me Proud Champions initiative, looking to address the multiple stigma around both mental health and LGBT identities. Also in relation to mental health, we successfully lobbied the Scottish Government to ensure the inclusion of LGBT people as an at-risk group in relation to suicide prevention.

The demand for our trans-specific services has never been higher. Encouragingly, we've been able to expand our service offer in Edinburgh, as well as continue to co-deliver a series of Trans Awareness sessions to managers and frontline NHS staff in Lothian. We have also been able to feed into the government's consultation on the reform of the Gender Recognition Act.

Our services continue to develop to respond to the needs of our communities. To further increase the reach and range of ways people can seek support from our helpline, we've launched our online LiveChat service. As part of our wider inclusion work, seeking to make our services more accessible to the D/deaf community, we have made our helpline fully accessible to BSL users.

Crucially we have, through new Scottish Government funding, been able to significantly increase our capacity for policy and influencing work. This will help us to ensure that the experiences and views of the LGBT+ people who use our services contribute to national policy development. We've also been successful in securing our first, albeit short term, statutory funding in Glasgow, where demand for our services has continued to grow rapidly.

Organisationally, we have focused on promoting the health and wellbeing of staff and volunteers. In recognition of this we have been awarded the Investing in Volunteering accreditation, as well as a Healthy Working Lives Silver Award.

We are extremely proud of everything we have collectively achieved over the last year. The support of our many colleagues and partners across the LGBT, community development, equality sectors, and beyond has been a crucial component in our success. Finally, we would like to say a big thank you to the many wonderful and diverse individuals from across Scotland's LGBT+ community who use and value our services.

Yorath Turner, **Chair** | Maruska Greenwood, **Chief Executive**

## Our Work with LGBT People in 2018-19



**4,647** people accessed groups activities  
268 events delivered



**788** people received 1-1 support  
241 people accessed counselling



**1,307** Helpline enquiries responded to



**158** volunteers  
7,816 hours of volunteering contributed



**13** community groups supported  
228 weekly, fortnightly or monthly community groups meetings held

# Introduction




LGBT Health and Wellbeing works to improve the health, wellbeing and equality of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in Scotland. Originally established in Edinburgh in 2003, the organisation continues to grow and develop and now delivers services in Glasgow and Edinburgh, as well as a number of Scotland-wide initiatives.

## The organisation's key objectives are to:

- Provide a programme of activities which tackle the life circumstances that contribute to the ill-health of LGBT people
- Reduce levels of isolation and social exclusion experienced by LGBT people
- Strengthen the capacity of the LGBT community to promote the health of individuals
- Support individuals to adopt and sustain healthy lifestyles
- Ensure that LGBT people have equity of access to mainstream health services and information responsive to their needs.

# Our Programmes and Services

We deliver a number of national services and initiatives:

LGBT Helpline Scotland	Dementia Project	Policy and Influencing
		
Phone, email and online information, support and referrals in relation to LGBT issues.	Promoting understanding of the issues faced by LGBT people affected by dementia.	Promoting the interests of LGBT people in relation to health, wellbeing and equality issues.



As well as a range of services, projects and activities in Glasgow and Edinburgh:

<b>Community Projects</b> 	<b>Community Groups</b> 	<b>Mental Wellbeing</b> 
Vibrant programme of LGBT social events, community discussions and groups.	Support to existing, new and emerging LGBT community groups.	Courses, groups, drop-ins, counselling and one-to-one support promoting wellbeing.
<b>LGBT Age</b> 	<b>Transgender Programme</b> 	<b>Rainbow Families</b> 
Social opportunities, groups and activism for LGBT people over the age of 50.	Social opportunities, support and information for transgender adults.	Programme of support and social opportunities for LGBT parents and their children,

## Support Across the Life Course

LGBT Health and Wellbeing supports the entire diversity of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender community, including non-binary, queer, intersex and asexual people. And we engage with individuals right across the life course, from supporting parents and their children through Rainbow Families to older community members via LGBT Age, and everyone in-between. Often for individuals that engagement will, over time, span a number of different programmes and services offered by LGBT Health and Wellbeing.

We encourage LGBT community members and allies to get involved in their community and support us in shaping and delivering our many programmes, including as volunteers and community group leaders.

The quotes and case studies in this report explain the impact of our work by illustrating the engagement and journeys of some of our many community members.

# Our Impact

Our community is at the heart of everything we do. We wanted to share some feedback we received from participants and volunteers across our services. People told us they gained.

## Community



“Validation and acceptance in the queer community as a disabled bisexual person.”

“Friendships that are true lifelines. That mean I now feel better supported, more resilient and better about myself.”

“A sense of community and pride around my child’s identity.”

“A safe space to make and meet friends, get support and enjoy a sense of community.”

“Lots of friends, activity, support - my loneliness and alienation are gone.”

## Confidence



“More confidence in my identity. Validation with my gender changing and feeling for the first time this is ok - that I am allowed to change.”

“A better sense of self. I’m finding out, with empathic support, who I am. I feel empowered.”

“A space to define my identity free from social norms.”

“Feeling more at home in Glasgow and stronger in my queer identity.”

“Confidence, self-acceptance, information and support, a connection to community.”

## Belonging



“The most powerful words of all: you are not alone. An amazingly positive thing to experience when you’ve been hiding yourself away for most of your life.”

“Coming out a little older felt very isolating, but LGBT Health has made me feel like I still belong somewhere.”



## Volunteering



“I am very proud of what I do [as a volunteer] and the difference we all make and I plan to carry on doing it for as long as I can.”

“[As a volunteer] I feel truly respected and part of a valuable community team making a real difference.”

“I feel heard, valued and supported, and that my contribution as a volunteer is really making a difference.”

## Beyond Services

We have been providing direct services for LGBT people for more than 16 years, and it continues to be the core of our work. Over that time, we have also become increasingly involved in influencing public policy. We do this by using the rich understanding of the issues and of people’s experiences we gain from working directly with LGBT+ people. We respond to national and local consultations, contribute to working group and forums, films, articles, research and publications.

Some of the key impacts of this work this year have been ensuring the inclusion of LGBT+ people as an at-risk group in the Scottish Government’s work on suicide prevention, and of the needs of older LGBT+ people in Scotland’s Older People’s Framework.

This is very important work and has the potential to impact positively on the lives of many more LGBT+ people than we could ever engage with directly.

It is vital that national and local policies on health and wellbeing fully reflect the needs, experiences, and views of LGBT people. Previously this work has been largely unfunded and we have struggled to do it to the extent needed. We are therefore delighted to have been awarded funding from the Scottish Government which has enabled us to employ a Policy and Influencing Manager, who took up post in early 2019, greatly increasing our capacity for policy and influencing work.



# Real Life

The people who know most about what our services do, and about the impact this has on health and wellbeing, are the people who use our services. You can see our broad and varied programme of events and services online at [www.lgbthealth.org.uk](http://www.lgbthealth.org.uk).

Below, you can read in more detail what these mean to people's lives. Names and details have been changed in some of the case studies to preserve anonymity. The images used are not of the individuals who have shared their story.

## LGBT Helpline

### Tam's story

Tam is a gay man from Edinburgh in his late thirties with a twenty-year history of alcohol addiction. Hospitalised many times, he spoke on the helpline about “**deliberately drinking myself to death**”.

Having experienced childhood sexual abuse, for years Tam was convinced that his homosexuality was ‘caused’ by him being abused as a child. He was drinking every day, sometimes as much as a full bottle of vodka. He had never had a relationship with a man. Because of the shame he felt he couldn't even say the word ‘gay’. He referred to himself as ‘a monster’ on many occasions.

Tam called the helpline weekly for many years, and we gave him a space to let his feelings out, whilst gently challenging his views about himself. For example, during one call, one of our volunteers gently informed Tam that there is no link between childhood abuse and homosexuality, that every study has found this to be a false link. Tam sounded extremely shocked by this, and quite delighted; he now tells us that hearing this was a lightbulb moment for him, as relating his sexuality to this “**horrible thing that was done to me as a child**” made his sexuality feel impossible to take pride in.

Suddenly Tam didn't call us for several months, and the helpline team were very concerned. However, we later took a call from him telling us that he had been off alcohol for months for the first time in years, and that he was “**feeling fantastic**”. He sounded like quite a different person – energised, happy, witty and alert.

Tam has now been sober for over a year, is creating profiles on dating sites and has even started referring to himself as gay without shame. He still calls us from time to time, but now it is to ask for relationship advice. He recently told us:



“This helpline has been central to me getting through these last few years – I was at death's door (with alcohol), I really was. To be able to get to a point where I can openly talk about my sexuality and start dating men...it's a miracle. I couldn't have done it if it wasn't the support you gave me.”

# Community Programme and Counselling

## Zy's story

Zy had recently left their home in the Philippines to move back to Glasgow. They were experiencing poor mental health and lacked social connections. Zy's first experience of LGBT Health was coming along to our Community Programme Wellbeing Café and Clay Time events.

In their mid-20s, they describe themselves as an Asian queer person. Zy had struggled to find welcoming spaces where they could be themselves in the Philippines, and they were dubious about their chances of feeling completely at home in a predominantly white Western community. However, they were pleasantly surprised by the diversity, accepting and non-judgmental atmosphere at LGBT Health's community spaces:

"I had turned away from art because of my perfectionism, and I'm now amazed at what I can do. That welcoming, non-judgmental atmosphere has helped me enjoy it. It's amazing that in those two hours [at Clay Time] I can focus and switch off, rediscover and explore."

Through coming along to community events, Zy discovered that we offer a counselling service. They felt that being able to see a counsellor regularly was really key to them starting to get better.



"This is the best counsellor I've ever had... [through] all the counselling I've done before I know about compassion, etc ... but my LGBT Health counsellor shared that in a really impactful way. Even after our counselling sessions have ended, her words continue to affirm."

Zy has had such a positive experience that they are passionate about giving back to the community. With support from LGBT Health and LEAP Sports (a charity promoting participation in sports for LGBTI people) they have co-founded the LGBT Basketball group in Glasgow, and also volunteer as part of our See Me Proud mental health initiative.

Whilst the support from LGBT Health has enabled them to recover their mental health, they are clear that playing an active part in our community enables them to maintain their wellbeing. Zy's leadership role within our community has given them the confidence to continue to grow and keep learning: **"you realise there is no one way of being LGBT, and that's ok."**

# Rainbow Families

## Cynthia and Raven's story

Cynthia is the parent of a non-binary child, 12-year-old Raven. They came to Rainbow Families hoping to connect with another family with a non-binary child.

“Rainbow Families really was a lifeline. We were really toiling, but we were able to meet a whole new family going through the exact same thing.”

Raven had been finding friendships at school increasingly difficult, was feeling lonely and dreamt of finding a non-binary friend – someone who would properly understand and accept them for who they are.

Cynthia had already found some support from other parents via the UK charity Mermaids, but the support was all online and she wanted to connect in real life with someone who had a similar parenting experience.

During group introductions at their first Rainbow Families event, when everyone had the chance to say which pronouns they prefer to use, Raven immediately noticed another child using ‘they/them’ pronouns. Cynthia approached the child’s parent and the two families introduced themselves to each other. She says she is so glad they took this step, as the two children have been best friends ever since that day!

For Cynthia, Rainbow Families has been a space that provides support and validation:



“You know you’re not the only one. When you’ve got that support, you know your child’s identity and your experiences matter, and you have the right to ask for help. Jules (Community Development Worker) had an inspirational way of talking. She was always friendly, always supportive, but 100% standing up for the child.”

Being able to meet face-to-face with staff and other LGBT+ families has been the thing that’s made the difference. Cynthia knows that she now has a real-life community around her family.

Since joining Rainbow Families, Cynthia and her family have started to attend Pride celebrations and, in everyday life, are “*blazing the trail*” for trans equality. She notes the small but hugely significant everyday acts she has the confidence to carry out. One example is alerting service providers to the need to offer gender neutral pronoun options – e.g. ‘Mx’; ‘nonbinary’; ‘they/them’. Not only does this help create a more equal work for Raven as they grow up, but it also helps create more inclusive services for non-binary people generally.

# Transgender Support

## Lucy and Polly

Lucy and her partner Polly first heard about T time (our monthly transgender social) through our helpline. They got in touch with the helpline after experiencing multiple instances of abuse, ranging from verbal attacks to physical and sexual assaults, within their church community. The couple were feeling extremely isolated and in need of community support.

Now she and Polly are both T time regulars. Lucy says that for her the group has been **“a safe place I can go, [a place] I feel safe and secure”**. Lucy says she has suspected autism and felt awkward and nervous when she first came along, but the group has given her a sense of validation and the confidence.

**“T time has enabled me to now be myself as a trans woman full time. If I carried on down the old road, that would have led to suicide because I wasn’t coping. It’s made me stronger, it’s made me proud.”**

Besides a welcoming and affirming space where she can be herself, Lucy has received one-to-one support from Katrina, our Development Worker, who was able to support her engagement with the Sandyford Gender Identity Clinic, helping to bring about the positive outcomes Lucy needed.



**“Being comfortable in your own skin can be really expensive, and this is difficult for trans people who are not in work, or on a low income.”**

Despite making massive strides in accessing support, Lucy and Polly continue to face many challenges due to Lucy’s trans identity and the everyday abuse she encounters, as well as the difficulties of being on a low income. For them this means no internet access at home, and they struggle to find affordable clothes and shoes for Lucy in high street shops. In common with many trans people, they also have difficulties meeting the cost of private hair removal treatments, necessary as NHS funding for this is too limited.



# LGBT Age

## John's story

John is in his early 60s and was at his local Health Centre when he noticed the colourful LGBT Health Social Programme brochure, which listed LGBT Age events. John's partner of 20 years had passed away a couple of years earlier, and since then he had found himself very socially isolated. During this period of bereavement he was experiencing symptoms of anxiety and depression, and didn't feel ready to brave the commercial gay 'scene' for company or social interaction. John found he didn't have any real support network to help him overcome his situation.

Alongside the anxiety and depression, John also had some other physical health issues, which further contributed to a 'dark period' for him. However, whilst on the waiting list for Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, at this stage the only support John was getting was through his GP.

On reading the Social Programme brochure, John felt that the LGBT Age Project offered him a range of social events and activities which might help him overcome his anxiety and depression. John has over the last couple of years attended many of the events, including becoming a regular at the monthly Coffee Posse, as well joining in museum visits, meals out and other activities. He has found the events a safe, welcoming and accepting space to start to once again build trusting relationships and make friends.

"I felt I needed to re-engage with people following my bereavement. It was noticeable to me that I'd isolated myself from just about everyone, apart from my brother who I still saw regularly. I particularly needed to be around other LGBT people in order to feel a connection to others I could easily identify with in terms of needs, feelings and aspirations."

He has also accessed one-to-one support through our Mental Health Project. He found the sessions helpful in dealing with his bereavement, focusing his mind on the 'good things' in his life at the time.

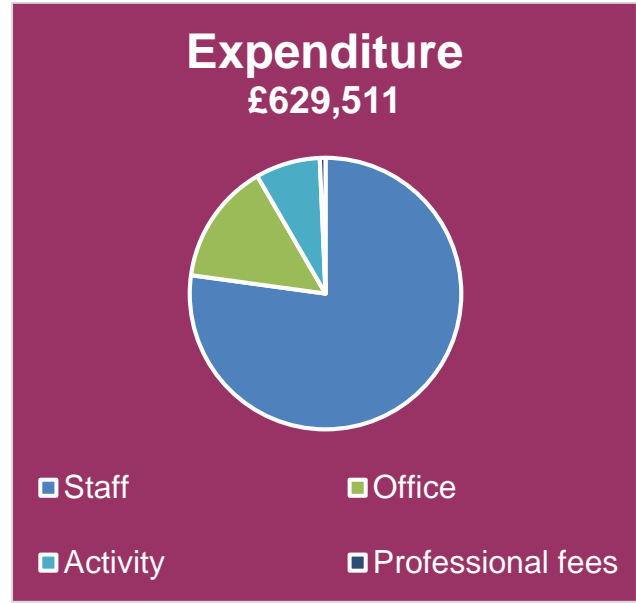
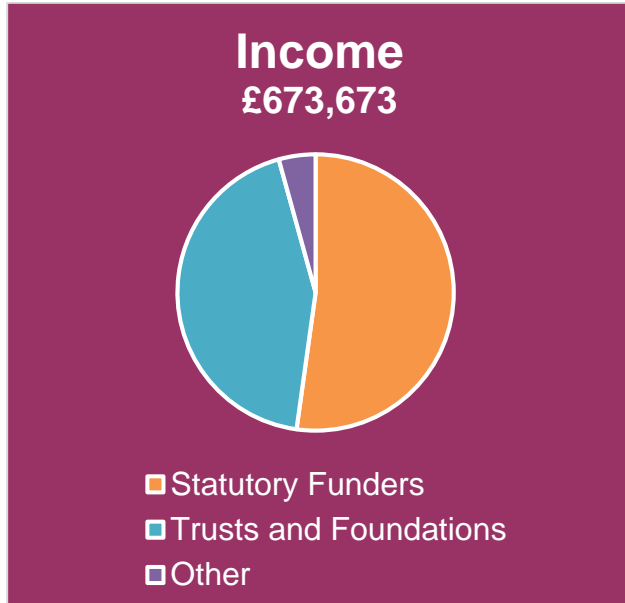
He describes his engagement with the organisation as 'life changing' in providing him with a much needed sense of purpose.



"Engaging with LGBT Age has 'got me out of the house' for want of a better explanation. It has had the positive effect of re-engaging me with the people around me and given me a focus in terms of looking forward to the activities and events, which I had not been able to do during the worst period of bereavement of the past few years."

# Finance Summary

In spite of a tough financial climate we have seen the organisation's income grow substantially this year (up 29% from £523,960 in the previous year). This is primarily due to securing funding for new projects.



We are extremely grateful to our statutory partners, the many trusts and foundations, and the individual and corporate donors who fund our work. Together, their contributions enable us to deliver our key support services to Scotland's LGBT community.



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