



LGBT Health and Wellbeing Annual Report 2019-20



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

www.lgbthealth.org.uk

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Foreword

This has been another busy and eventful year for us, engaging with people from across the LGBT+ community and throughout the life course. There have been many new developments and highlights. Alongside the very strong delivery of our more established Community, Trans, Mental Wellbeing and LGBT Age (50+) programmes, we've also continued to develop newer initiatives. Our two-year LGBT Dementia Project gathered pace, including through a secondment from Alzheimer Scotland, and the work of See Me Proud has grown from strength to strength, boosted by a new cohort of champions. One of the year's highlights has been LGBT Age's short film *Return to the Closet?*; made in collaboration with Luminare it reflects on the hopes, fears and aspirations of older LGBT people in relation to care.

Much of the focus of our policy work has been on mental health, including our National Conversation on Mental Health events, as well as continuing to support our community's involvement in the campaign for Gender Recognition Act reform.

We remain strongly focused on responding to the needs of our communities. After increased engagement with asylum seekers and refugees, we scoped the acute needs of this section of our community, and secured funding for a ground-breaking Glasgow-based LGBT Refugee Project, which launched in March 2020.

We showcased our vibrant and increasingly well-established Glasgow work at our Well Proud Information Event in the City Chambers. However, in spite of the successful development of these services, and the growing demand, we continue to lack statutory funding for our Glasgow work. This means programmes remain reliant on precarious funding, and are proving hard to sustain. In contrast, we've continued to secure public sector contracts to deliver much of our Edinburgh-based work.

Organisationally, we have continued to focus on promoting the health and wellbeing of staff and volunteers. And our Accommodation Working Group has been looking at the organisation's premises, with an initial focus on the relocation of our Edinburgh office base.

At the end of the period covered by this annual report we entered lockdown. Our staff and volunteers responded to this unprecedented challenge immediately and with great creativity and resourcefulness, enabling us to move within days to remote service delivery. As well as moving our group delivery online, and providing one-to-one support remotely, we extended the hours of our LGBT Helpline Scotland and set up a new outreach Telefriending Service. Our key message to the LGBT+ community has been: *"We are still here for you - we have suspended face to face services and events, but we are not stopping our work."*

This year, more than ever, 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 continue to provide an excellent service for the community, even through the challenges of Covid-19.

We are extremely proud of everything we have collectively achieved over the last year. We could not have done this without the support of our many partners, and most crucially the engagement of so many wonderful and diverse individuals from across Scotland's LGBT+ community.

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

2019-20 At a Glance

Over the course of 2019-20 our work with LGBT people included the following:



4,750 people accessed group activities
321 events delivered



947 people received 1-1 support
219 people accessed counselling



1,309 Helpline enquiries responded to



143 volunteers
6,693 hours of volunteering contributed



15 community groups supported
222 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:

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

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 the different programmes and services we offer.

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 as 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 LGBT Health and Wellbeing does. We wanted to share some of the feedback we received this year from participants and volunteers across our many services. People told us what they gained from their engagement with the organisation.

Community



“Access to great services and a friendly community.”

“I now feel connected to a community I didn’t have before and I have been able to come out.”

“Community, acceptance, validation and a sense of belonging.”

“Friendship, support and information about transgender issues.”

“Calm, happiness, hope, friends, support and community.”

Confidence



“Have gained more understanding of myself.”

“Have gained the most important thing in a person’s life, confidence, which I lacked, especially when it came to my sexual orientation.”

“I am more aware of myself, my needs and how to communicate them.”

“The knowledge and life skills to make my transition smoother.”

“Have gained the confidence to be me.”

Acceptance and belonging



“I am not alone. There are other people like me.”

“An understanding of how my bisexuality works, enabling me to move beyond unhelpful old fashioned binary stereotypes.”

“I feel more confident and more included in our LGBT+ community.”

“I have been able to make friends and express myself, be proud of who I am becoming.”

“Has allowed me to process who I am and be happy with my sexuality.”

Volunteering



“Through volunteering I have the satisfaction of being part of my community and meeting new people. It has enabled me to no longer feel lonely in my journey.”

“I feel really supported by the LBGT&W team to be involved in the project, and the wider work of the organisation. The support, enthusiasm and passion from the staff is so great to have.”

“Volunteering gives me a sense of contributing positively to my community. I feel of value and have the fulfilment of knowing that the time I put into helping out benefits someone.”

“Volunteering provides me with the opportunity to use my skills and experience as a Counsellor, and a proud gay man, to support my community.”

Beyond Services

We have now been providing direct services for LGBT people for more than 17 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, and contribute actively to working groups and forums, films, articles, research and publications.

It is vital that national and local policies on health and wellbeing fully reflect the needs, experiences, and views of LGBT people. 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.

Some of our focus over this year has been on: highlighting the issues faced by LGBT people with dementia and carers; calling attention to the experiences of LGBT asylum seekers and refugees; promoting trans equality and wellbeing; advocating for LGBT mental and emotional wellbeing, including through supporting the work of the See Me Proud Champions.



Ministerial visit from Christina McKelvie, Minister for Older People and Equalities.

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. Below, you can read in more detail some examples of what these mean to people's lives. Names and details have been changed in some of the case studies to preserve anonymity.

LGBT Helpline

Mike's story

Mike is a trans man in his 50s who lives in a council flat in a rural area. He transitioned many years ago and says that although he 'passes', his neighbour somehow seems to know that he is trans. He initially called in late 2019, experiencing anxiety due to transphobic comments and hostility from his neighbour, who had been calling him a 'weirdo' and 'poof' and banging on the walls.

Mike called us again in 2020 because lockdown was affecting his mental health quite badly. He was experiencing anxiety due to the fact his next door neighbours had started banging on the walls again. He feared the transphobic harassment of the previous year might be starting again at a time when he said **"I need to feel safe more than ever"**.

In Mike's first call our support focused mostly on his rights as a tenant, and as a trans person. We encouraged him to explore his options with the council as well as offering emotional support and suggesting counselling with a local service. He took our advice of complaining to the council, which seemed to stop the transphobic behaviour.

The second call was more about helping him explore how he was emotionally responding to being in lockdown. The volunteer who took both calls built a strong rapport with Mike through his own experiences as a trans man, which the Mike really appreciated.



LGBT Helpline Scotland

Tuesdays and Wednesdays | 12-9pm
Thursdays and Sundays | 1-6pm

☎ 0300 123 2523 0300 123 2523

✉ helpline@lgbthealth.org.uk

🌐 www.lgbthealth.org.uk

"It's really helped me to speak with another trans man who has been through this (abuse from neighbours), and who can genuinely empathise with my situation."

"I felt like I was going out of my mind this morning, but talking to you today has made me feel a lot better and brighter. I'm trying not to jump to conclusions but at the same time be vigilant, which is hard to balance but I think I'm managing with your support!"

Mike joined in some LGBT Health and Wellbeing online social events, and continues to keep in contact with us to talk things through, especially when he is struggling with his mental health.

Community and Mental Wellbeing Programmes

Ruth's story

Originally from Jamaica, Ruth is in her 50s and came to Glasgow as an asylum seeker, seeking safety from persecution based on her sexuality as a bisexual woman. Ruth's first visited LGBT Health and Wellbeing back in late 2018 for a one-to-one support meeting. She was looking for emotional support, and help to find a way forward in her new life here in Glasgow.

New to Glasgow and newly out, Ruth was extremely isolated and looking for social connections: **"I also wanted to experience what I had missed out on over the past"**. She felt grief and loss, having endured shame, neglect and hiding in her past. One-to-one support was a place where Ruth could talk about this and help find ways to reclaim these parts of her.

"I was just coming out of the closet and out of an abusive marriage. I was so damaged psychologically. I was all over the place. Without LGBT Health and Wellbeing, I wouldn't be here today. I came close to suicide a few times. It has been my saviour".

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After experiencing so much exclusion and rejection, Ruth found a healing sense of belonging at LGBT Health and Wellbeing. **"I so look forward to coming. I don't feel like an outsider or outcast here. I feel at home here"**.

One-to-one support has **"opened more doors for me and given me the confidence to push more doors open"**. Since that first meeting, the one-to-one support sessions have helped Ruth find the confidence not only to be a deeply valued member of other groups such as LGBT Age and LGBT Unity (the community group for LGBT refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants), but Ruth also to become a volunteer.



"I am also now integrating and supporting others in LGBT Unity while getting support for myself. I have been learning how to self-care too. The one-to-one support is helping me with that."

Ruth is now a very active member of the LGBT community. She has gone on to sit on the board for LEAP Sports, the LGBT Reference Group for Police Scotland, the Equalities Gathering Group for the Scottish Refugee Council and is an active member of Glasgow's LGBT Metropolitan Community Church. Ruth is a human rights activist proudly waving the rainbow flag for herself and her community, and is a devoted ally to others in need in Glasgow and beyond.

Counselling Service

Ryan's story

Ryan is in his late 20s, and works full-time. He is in contact with his family, but describes his relationship with them, especially his parents, as 'strained'. Ryan had his first male partner as a teenager. He thinks his family knew, but it was never talked about. Being gay couldn't be talked about at school either. Ryan is single. He has struggled with anxiety since his teens, and has self-harmed and felt suicidal in the past.

Ryan said he can't remember a time he didn't feel anxious. He finds his emotions terrifying and has only ever been able to cope by bottling up his feelings. He is scared of losing control and has no experience of feeling emotions, even difficult ones, as healthy and normal. As a teenager and into his twenties, he drank a lot and was reckless with his personal safety, including sexually. He has never discussed this with anyone, nor sought support. He had never had counselling before, and found out about the counselling service at LGBT Health online.

"Referring myself to the counselling service was quite a scary decision because I've never had counselling before. I didn't know what it would be like. The process was totally straightforward. Everyone I spoke to was friendly and helpful and that made me feel like it was going to be ok."

Early sessions were spent building up a picture of Ryan's life, helping him to see himself in context – growing up in a society in which being different was not ok and within an unsupportive family. Ryan began to see how bottling up his feelings was how he coped. He could see that he had internalised deep fears and shame about his sexuality and that his sense of self-worth and self-esteem had been negatively impacted by this. He had believed that if he let himself be known to others he would be rejected and hurt. He also realised how self-critical he could be, blaming himself for his feelings and struggles.



"Having someone to talk to every week made a really big difference to me. I didn't always find it easy but my counsellor listened to me and helped me feel like I wasn't weird or strange."

"Talking to someone who understands LGBTQ+ issues definitely made a big difference. I didn't have to worry about them not knowing what I was talking about or not understanding. I wouldn't have felt safe enough to talk to someone I wasn't sure would be ok with me being gay."

Ryan learned some techniques for soothing and settling himself when he felt overwhelmed, as well as how he could start to let people into his life in a safer, more positive way. By the end of his 12 sessions, Ryan was sleeping better and was feeling more motivated and engaged. He understood he still had some way to go, but he was for the first time in many years, feeling hopeful for his future.

Mental Wellbeing Programmes

Sandra's story

Sandra is in her early 40s. She started coming to LGBT Health back in 2018 after some relationship issues. Her son had just moved out to go to university and she was struggling with her identity, both as a bisexual woman and as a mother. She was also dealing with grief, after the loss of her own mother soon after that.

Sandra accessed our Counselling Service, and also took part in group activities as part of our Mental Wellbeing Project, which she really valued.

In 2019 Sandra went through a period of depression, exacerbated by troubles at work and a difficult housing situation. She told us that support from LGBT Health and Wellbeing again helped her to turn things around.

“I started taking part in the mental health and wellbeing activities, such as art groups and community social activities and they were a lifeline to me. I found new friends in the LGBT community and we became an additional mutual support for each other, doing additional art and social activities together.”



“During all that time the support I got from my friends and LGBT Health and Wellbeing and the positive impact the mental health activities had on me gave me the strength to fight on. LGBT Health supported my application for the housing association waiting list, which I believe helped finding my wonderful new flat which I rent from a good landlord with social responsibility policies in place. I fell in love with a wonderful person and we have been in a happy relationship for over a year now.”

Since safety measures were put in place around Covid-19, we transferred our programme of events and social activities online. Sandra continues to take part in our online activities, and keeps in touch regularly with her friends from LGBT Health.

“I am still drawing on the support from my friends and take part in the activities of LGBT Health and Wellbeing, which are now all online during the lockdown. The support from LGBT Health has been such an important part of my life over the last two years and I am certain it will be over the coming months, whilst we are all suffering from the impacts of the current crisis.”

LGBT Age Social Programme

Patrick's story

Patrick was a very quiet, gentle and nervous man. He was in his early 70s when he first started attending LGBT Health events in Edinburgh in 2014, initially our weekly drop-ins, and later our LGBT Age film nights. Patrick only felt able to attend events that took place within LGBT Health's space at 9 Howe Street, as he feared being outed should he attend an event in an external venue.

Although Patrick was a regular attendee at our events for around 6 years neither community members, the volunteers or LGBT Health staff knew much about his life. He was always very guarded with private information such as which part of the city he lived in, and wouldn't talk about his family. Patrick was always made time to ask others about their lives but would prefer to sit at the back of the room, on his own. One of the few things we knew about him was that his faith was very important to him, and that he volunteered regularly at his local chapel.

The fact that Patrick was very private, and didn't want to connect with peers out with Howe Street was absolutely fine. We all warmly welcomed him to our community. The volunteers would tell him that **"you're part of our family"**.

The only time that Patrick reached out to staff for support was when a young gay man, who Patrick described as an alcoholic, wouldn't leave him alone. Patrick didn't say how he'd met this man, but the man's attention 'became too much' for Patrick. Staff provided a listening ear, helped him to rehearse what he would say to this man to make him leave him alone, and encouraged Patrick to reach out to his Sheltered Housing Warden who could help stop him from visiting Patrick at his home.

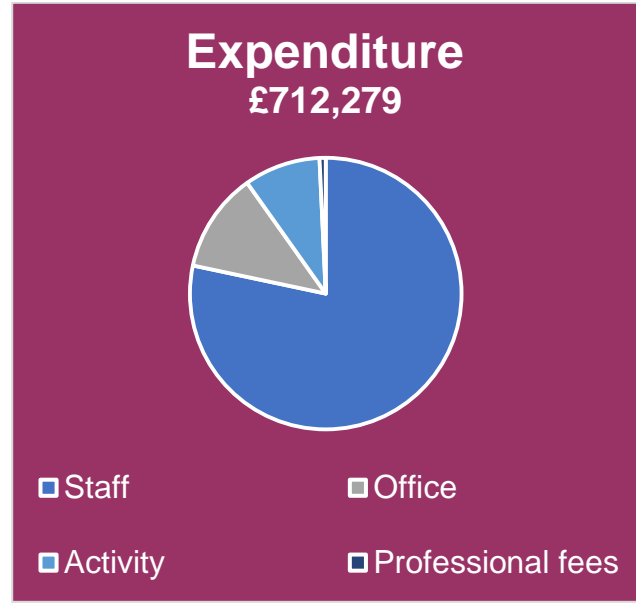
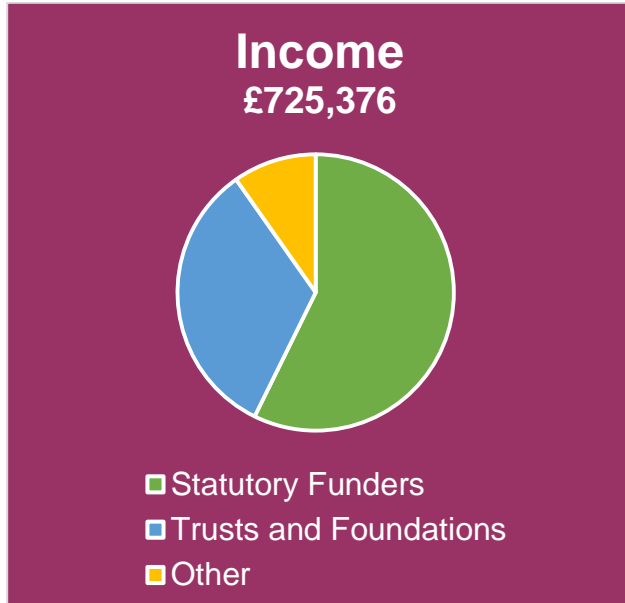
We didn't see Patrick for a number of weeks and his absence was felt. As he was always guarded with contact details it was not possible to give him a phone call to see how he was. Sadly, we were later told that Patrick had passed away due to health problems. He remains warmly within our hearts.



"I moved to Edinburgh many, many years ago and I love this city – it's my home. For a long time I didn't have any friends. Mind you, I didn't have friends back home either. You are all my friends now. I feel very welcome here [at the LGBT Age socials]. I like coming here. Wouldn't miss it."

Finance Summary

Our organisation's income has remained relatively stable compared to the previous year (£732,371 in the previous year).



We are extremely grateful to our statutory partners, the many trusts and foundations, and the individual and corporate donors who fund our work. This year we have also benefited from support through a substantial legacy. Together, these contributions enable us to deliver our key support services to Scotland's LGBT+ community.





Registered office

LGBT Healthy Living Centre
(operates as LGBT Health and Wellbeing)

Duncan Place Community Hub
4 Duncan Place
Edinburgh
EH6 8HW

Scottish Charity No. SC034216 | Company Limited by Guarantee No. SC2462

www.lgbthealth.org.uk



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