

The background of the entire page is a rainbow color palette (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple) with a grid pattern. A white, scalloped-edged border frames the central text.

The Rainbow Ripples Report

Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual
disabled people's experiences
of service provision in Leeds

Executive Summary

by Rainbow Ripples and
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Hull

Context of this research

- Previous research into the experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) disabled people have concentrated either on a very narrow range of experiences, particularly in relation to their sexuality and sexual orientation, or on people with a particular type of impairment.
- This is the first study to look in detail at a wide range of disabled people's experiences of a wide range of services.
- Twelve service areas are considered, using a Social Model of Disability approach. These are education and training, employment, housing, transport, technical aids and equipment, personal assistance, advocacy, counselling, health, leisure, community and social life, safety, harassment and discrimination.

The aims of the project

- To gain an understanding of the needs and hopes of LGB disabled people in Leeds.
- To assess current service provision from statutory and voluntary agencies, and private businesses for LGB disabled people in Leeds.
- To gain an understanding of what constitutes good practice.
- To inform service providers of LGB disabled people's needs and how they can best meet them.
- To raise the profile of LGB disabled people and the barriers they experience.

Methodology

- This research was planned and co-ordinated by Rainbow Ripples, a group of lesbian, gay and bisexual disabled people in Leeds.
- The research involved: i) 20 interviews with LGB disabled people who live, work and/or spend leisure time in Leeds; ii) 5 interviews with key service providers; and iii) a questionnaire survey of 437 service providers in Leeds (60 questionnaires were returned). It should be noted that questionnaires were sent to a mixture of community, commercial, statutory and voluntary organisations working in a wide range of service areas.

The unique experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual disabled people

- There are few services which specifically consider LGB disabled people.
- There are problems of homophobia in services particularly aimed at/developed for disabled people.
- There are problems of disablism in services particularly aimed at/developed for LGB people.
- There are interrelated misconceptions about disabled and LGB people which impact on service provision.
- LGB disabled people sometimes have to deal with homophobia and disablism at the same time. The combination of the two can make their overall experience more than twice as bad as either experience on its own.
- LGB disabled people have their own culture and have sometimes responded creatively to the discrimination they face and gained personal strength, confidence and determination from their experiences.

The current state of service provision

- Many services remain inaccessible to many LGB disabled people.
- Organisations have tended to focus on improving services for people with particular impairments, rather than the full range.
- There is little information to tell service users if an organisation and its staff are LGB friendly.
- Few organisations monitor sexual orientation in employment or service provision and often monitoring in relation to disability is not carried out in a way which provides useful information to improve services.

Lessons to learn from LGB disabled people's experiences of services in Leeds - key recommendations for service providers

This report contains a wide range of recommendations for government as well as particular service providers. Some relate to the needs of both LGB and heterosexual disabled people, and some to the needs of all LGB people. In this executive summary we focus in particular, though not exclusively, on those which specifically affect people who are both LGB and disabled.

General Policies

- When introducing equality and diversity policies there must be an awareness that people often fit into more than one social category and that all their needs must be met. To this end there is a need for service providers working in different areas to communicate better with one another.
- People working with disabled people should have LGB equality training and vice versa. They should not assume someone is heterosexual or non-disabled if they do not know.
- There is a need for research into the potential introduction of a charter mark scheme for services to indicate to clients how LGB and disabled friendly they are to LGB people and to disabled people. A directory of LGB and disabled people friendly services is desirable.

- Monitoring and evaluation of service provision, in relation to disability and sexual orientation needs to be strengthened.
- The specific implications of new legislation, and changes in the benefits system, for LGB disabled people need to be considered by policy makers. For example, the vastly differing transport costs faced by different disabled people are not reflected in the standardised Disability Living Allowance mobility payments. The impact of changes to welfare benefits due to Civil Partnerships legislation on the income of LGB disabled people is as yet unclear.

Education

- Everyone needs access to good quality education on sex and relationships, including lesbian and gay issues. In particular, young disabled people need the same access to this as their non-disabled peers.
- The value of the internet as an informal source of learning for many LGB disabled people needs to be acknowledged. It reflects their needs for flexible and distance teaching methods. Service providers should considering developing such educational sites further for information and discussion.

Employment

- In large organisations it may be possible to have a specifically LGB disabled employees support group. These groups could provide 3 roles; support for workers, feedback to management on issues of concern and a consultation route for management on new developments, and policies.
- Self employment was a popular option for many LGB disabled people. Agencies supporting self employment need to look at their marketing and services to LGB disabled people.

Housing

- Increased accessible housing needs to be available in LGB friendly areas. Housing providers need to accept LGB people's wishes in relation to safety and location as a valid factor in priority for re-housing and in making appropriate offers of housing.
- The Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) should specifically look at the practice of care homes in relation to freedom of expression and support for LGB service users.
- There needs to be more investigation into alternative forms of housing to meet the needs of LGB disabled people, such as co-housing.

Transport

- There is a need for door to door services, such as taxis and dial-a-ride schemes, which some disabled people have to rely upon, to indicate if they are LGB friendly.

Technical Aids and Equipment

- There should be more outlets available for advice and ordering of technical aids and equipment, including service providers that are specifically LGB friendly.
- The internet is a vital link to the LGB community for many LGB disabled people and this should be reflected in assessments for equipment.

Personal Assistance

- The mandatory training of all social care staff, through NVQs should include training on LGB equality and disability equality issues, alongside other equality issues.
- Preventing homophobia in social care provision should be an integral part of the independent inspection processes by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) and the contract monitoring of Social Services Departments.
- Providing a “culturally competent” service to LGB disabled people includes recognising the need for interaction with LGB communities.

- Services which give more control to the LGB disabled person can often offer them increased flexibility in how they choose to meet their needs. Services such as a “brokerage scheme” as an alternative to Direct Payments and a “Personal Assistants Bank”, including PAs that are LGB friendly should be investigated further.

Health and Counselling

- There is some evidence that high percentages of LGB disabled people use counselling services. Counsellors should be aware of this and have suitable training in LGB and disability equality issues, including the impact of multiple discrimination on people’s well-being.
- The common assumption that mental health problems and/or mental distress are the result of a person’s sexual orientation needs to be challenged.
- Counselling services should consider the training of staff in BSL and other communication skills as the need for a third party to sit in on personal and emotional discussions can be damaging to the experience.
- Health services as a whole need more specific consultation and involvement work with LGB people to root out homophobia in service provision.

Advocacy

- Advocacy services for both LGB and disabled people need to increase in Leeds; as part of this there needs to be more discussion between advocacy organisations and LGB disabled people about advocacy needs, in order to develop the best model of advocacy for LGB disabled people in Leeds.

Leisure

- Personal assistants, key workers, social workers and others can play a key role in assisting people in accessing the leisure activities they would like. Such people therefore need to be aware of LGB venues and groups.

Community/Social Life

- The potential of some form of peer support network/project for LGB disabled people should be investigated. This would enable LGB disabled people to share information and develop their capacity to increase their social circles.
- The commercial “lesbian and gay scene” should be encouraged to improve its access to disabled people, this includes less obvious barriers such as lighting and noise levels, and social barriers created by the body beautiful image.
- Community education around equality issues, particularly attitudes such as disablism and racism needs to take place and the LGB commercial scene needs to take some of this agenda on.

- There needs to be an LGB-friendly non-commercial venue in Leeds city centre, with good physical access, to enable LGB community organisations and groups to improve their access to disabled people.
- Organisations and groups planning community activities should take into consideration the extra costs that disabled people often have to meet in attending such events (e.g. accessible transport, BSL interpretation and personal assistance). Assistance with such costs should be offered where ever possible.
- Organisations of or for disabled people need to be more pro-active in promoting LGB equality issues through; staff training, use of equality policies, specific information which makes LGB people welcome and specific activities for LGB disabled people, where requested.

Safety, harassment and discrimination -

- Information on homophobic and disablist crime should be made available in a number of formats, to encourage LGB disabled people to report hate crime.
- Police and other services need to ensure that crime such as verbal abuse is taken seriously and that it is not regarded as “low-level” anti social behaviour, because of the impact it has on the mental health and freedom of LGB disabled people.
- Independent reporting centres need to understand both homophobic and disablist hate crime in order to provide an alternative monitoring method to reporting to the police.

User controlled services

- In addition to self employment (see above) many LGB disabled people expressed an interest in user-controlled services as a way of obtaining culturally appropriate and non discriminatory services.

Conclusions

In this executive summary we have drawn attention to some of the key issues for service providers when considering their LGB disabled service users, customers and employees. There are an estimated 500,000 LGB disabled people living in Britain today and all service providers need to cater for their needs. The illustrations of the nature of discrimination and exclusion that these people have to face on a daily basis will be familiar to many, and should push service providers into action. Both practical access issues and the attitudinal barriers of service providers need to be challenged in order to improve services. Further research needs to be conducted in 3 years time to see if improvements have been made. Rainbow Ripples will continue to work in this area.

The Rainbow Ripples Report

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