

# Developing inclusive environments for older lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) people in care homes: Findings from a pilot scheme using LGBT Community Advisors in England.



## Background to the scheme

Research on older LGBT people's experiences indicates that they are an invisible and marginalised population in later life and their life-stories and relationships are frequently overlooked by care providers (Willis et al, 2016; Simpson et al, 2015). Moving into and living in long-term residential care can be an isolating and fearful experience (Westwood, 2016). Having access to external advocates is highly important to wellbeing, dignity and safety in care homes. **The aim of this project was to pilot a scheme to enhance the inclusion of older LGBT residents through LGBT community members undertaking community audits of current care home practices.** The scheme was implemented in one geographical locality across six care homes and funded by the Comic Relief 'Care Home Challenge' Fund. The care homes belonged to one national provider of housing and care for older people (Anchor Housing).

## About the intervention

Eight LGBT volunteers (50+ years) were recruited to act as Community Advisors to advise Anchor management on developing inclusive, LGBT-responsive environments. Following an initial training programme, Advisors were allocated in pairs to each home to spend concentrated periods of time undertaking an 'audit' over a six-month period (Jan-June 2016). This involved: talking to residents, staff and other stakeholders about the inclusion of LGBT residents; viewing internal policies on equality and other key documents; and leading advisory sessions for staff to stimulate discussion on the topic. At the end of the audit period, Advisors met with managers to share their findings and worked in small groups with managers to identify actions for change.



Picture: Community advisors 2016

## Conclusions

While met with some initial resistance, Advisors have become critical friends to care home managers. The project took a 'co-production' turn to overcome initial resistance by Advisors leading on advisory sessions to bring staff members' attention to LGBT older people. Community advisors can be a valuable resource in bridging the gaps between the hetero-centric cultures of care homes and the lived realities of older LGBT people.

## References

Simpson, P., Horne, M., Brown, L.J.E., Brown Wilson, C., Dickinson, T. & Torkington, K. (2015). "Old(er) care home residents and sexual/ intimate citizenship", *Ageing and Society* 1-23. Advanced access 15th October 2015, DOI: 10.1017/S0144686X15001105. Westwood, S. (2016). LGBT ageing in the UK: spatial inequalities in older age housing/care provision. *Journal of Poverty and Social Justice*. Article first published online 15th February 2016, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1332/175982716X14538098308249> Willis, P., Maegusku-Hewett, T., Raithby, M. & Miles, P. (2016). Swimming upstream: the provision of inclusive care to older lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) adults in residential and nursing environments in Wales. *Ageing and Society* 36(2), pp. 282-306.

## Evaluation method

An external evaluation team from the Universities of Nottingham, Bristol and Edge Hill conducted a qualitative evaluation of the scheme. This included: - **1) pre and post-intervention semi-structured interviews (N=39) with community advisors (n=8), care home managers (n=6), key Anchor staff (n=3), the project leader and the external trainer; 2) observation of group meetings between Advisors and care home managers; 3) written feedback gathered from Advisors on training received; and, 4) focus group with members of Anchor's LGBT group.**

## Emerging findings

- Levels of knowledge and awareness of LGBT residents were low. Resistance conveyed through prejudiced statements from staff and residents. Religious beliefs identified as major barrier (e.g. 'Praying to heal someone of their sexual identity')
- Lack of recognition of LGBT individuals and low confidence to enquire sensitively about differences in sexual and gender identity.
- Organising audit visits sometimes challenging due to competing demands in the home and lack of prioritising by managers.
- Managers and staff receptive to advisory sessions led by Advisors. Feedback from managers about their increased awareness and sensitivity to older LGBT people's lives.

## Identified actions for improving practice

Managers together with Advisors identified a number of micro-strategies for enhancing LGBT inclusion. These were shared with the wider organisation to stimulate more strategic learning. For example:

1. **RECRUITMENT** – to include interview questions or case studies that test applicants' views on LGBT issues and re-assess during employees' 6-month probation period.
2. **LEADERSHIP** – to appoint a diversity champion in each home to lead and sustain inclusive practices. Provide staff awareness training sessions at regular periods.
3. **ENVIRONMENT** – to make LGBT-related literature and media available. Review outward-facing visuals and literature such as signs at entrances and home brochures – visually communicating LGBT-support.



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