

# **LONDON'S LESBIAN GAY BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT REPORT - (PIP) - PHASE ONE**

This study is the first formal research project by Kairos in Soho. It is the first ever comprehensive analysis of the London LGBT voluntary and community sector. The research is rooted in the principle of independence within the voluntary and community sector, the importance of grassroots involvement in strategic change and a commitment to equality. The project involved widespread collaboration and networking across a diverse and marginalised sector and it is this level of representation that has provided the foundation for the strategic development of appropriate and accessible London LGBT infrastructure.

May 2007

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Introduction

The working title of this project is the Phase I Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Infrastructure Development Project, shortened to 'PiP'.

This is an in-depth study of LGBT voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) in London. It was initiated and funded through the ChangeUp framework and managed by Kairos in Soho, a first-tier LGBT voluntary and community organisation. It is the first comprehensive mapping of the London LGBT sector and it was designed to give voice to the wide diversity across large and small organisations within the sector. The project aims to form a robust foundation for development of appropriate sector-driven London LGBT infrastructure.

## Context

The LGBT VCS operates in a climate of heterosexism: '...a system of beliefs, together with values, cultural norms, language, institutional practices and structures which are the means by which relations of domination and subordination are asserted;' (Fish, J, 2006) and homophobia: 'fear of feelings of love for members of one's own sex and therefore hatred of those feelings in others' (Audre Lorde 1978).

The following quote from the field work illustrates the underlying constraints and prejudices faced by the community, and therefore by LGBT VCOs:

'I think we suffer particular prejudice; I think plenty of people think gay people should not be beaten up in the street but actually they do not want us to have ordinary lives and children and think that we are all right.' (109)

The impact of this particular form of prejudice compounds with other prejudice such as racism and sexism and has a damaging impact in relation to health, community safety, confidence, education, employment, immigration, parenting, mental health and violence in the home. This context is fundamental to understanding the collective experience of the sector. The following aspects of context are explored and corroborated in the full report:

- whilst there is generally an increased interest in developing and funding infrastructure, the support for infrastructure that values and enables 'community of interest' organisations – that is those which focus on a specific community such as LGBT people or Black people - does not seem to be keeping pace and does not fit with the wider government agenda of integrating 'community of interest' and equality issues into mainstream policy and provision. The work of these organisations, and the unique contribution that they make to improving public

services, is therefore under threat. Engagement with existing infrastructure is challenging for the relatively small LGBT voluntary and community sector.

- the LGBT sector is disproportionately impaired by an institutional absence of information, including statistical data, socio-economic reporting, policy development and funding
- the changing funding landscape, in particular in relation to the government's agenda to increase the VCS's role in public service delivery, and outcome funding, are affecting smaller and 'community of interest'/equality VCOs and confining them to fewer funders and increased competition. This is especially acute in an LGBT context. Independence across the sector is known to be under threat.
- income across the London VCS, in particular amongst smaller organisations (under £100K income), has noticeably fallen in recent years. This trend has been exacerbated by the withdrawal of targeted funding for 'community of interest'/equality organisations and falling local government funding for these groups.
- the legislative landscape in relation to equality and human rights is moving at a rapid pace and there is increasing common perception that equality has been achieved. Whilst in the past two decades there has been legislative reform in relation to LGBT peoples' rights, it is too early to see, and there is little evidence to prove, that there have been consequent improvements in the health and social care context for LGBT people. Widespread misconception and lack of capacity within the LGBT VCS threaten to undermine the sector's contribution to the social reform process.
- a lack of rigour and understanding of the social and economic complexities and barriers facing LGBT people and VCOs are demonstrated in policy and research by central, regional and local government. Where contributions are solicited from the LGBT VCS, processes often ignore the evident low capacity within the sector.
- London is thought to accommodate an LGBT population equivalent to between 6% and 10% of the total population, which equates to the population of the City of Manchester. However, very little work has been done to assess and meet LGBT health and social care needs outside the sector to determine the role and needs of appropriate LGBT VCS services.

## **Method**

PiP consisted of early contextual exploration with LGBT VCOs, funders and second-tier organisations. Three lines of investigation were followed to identify as many LGBT VCOs as possible in London and to find out as much as possible about their

experience; an online questionnaire, twenty five in-depth semi-structured interviews and three focus groups.

## **Summary of main findings**

### **Capacity, scope and funding**

The number of LGBT VCOs operating in London is small. The study identified 67. This number is estimated to be at least 90% of *staffed and/or funded* LGBT VCOs in London and 50% of all LGBT VCOs in London, including the smallest community groups. This amounts to 0.17% of the total of approximately 40,000 London VCOs.

The LGBT population is diverse in relation to both communities and activity. LGBT groups focus on race, disability, parenting, faith, gender, age; and in relation to service or activity areas LGBT groups focus on: immigration and asylum, housing, AIDS/HIV, health and social care, strategy and infrastructure, policy, and legislative change. Other groups focus on social and leisure activity.

Almost half the organisations studied spend less than £10K annually and three quarters spend less than £50K annually.

Just 13 organisations have or spend more than £100K per annum.

The collective annual expenditure of 57 of the organisations is £6.09million. Thirty percent of this expenditure is carried out by one organisation. Seventy percent of this expenditure is carried out by five organisations.

Just 14 organisations have two or more paid staff. Sixty nine out of a total of 100 full-time staff working in the whole sector are employed by just five organisations and 32 work in one organisation.

Thirty one organisations are run exclusively by volunteers yet groups report exceptional difficulty in accessing funds to support volunteer management.

This spend is less than 0.07% of the total income of London's VCS. Nevertheless, the groups are resilient and are bolstered by volunteer time commitment, individual support, and donations and expertise.

Organisations rely heavily on independent funds (e.g. donations, fees and earnings).

A small number of the same trusts and foundations are mentioned repeatedly by LGBT VCOs as sources of funding and support.

The LGBT sector receives substantially lower levels of statutory funding in comparison to the VCS generally and this tends to be limited to a small number of the larger LGBT VCOs with a focus on health and mental health.

Volunteers donate more than double the average volunteering time when compared across the wider VCS.

More than half of the interviewed groups do not have sufficient income levels to break even by the end of the year (2006/7) and many that have reserves are using them to fund current year activity.

The resources available for most LGBT VCOs to develop, innovate and engage strategically are increasingly compromised.

LGBT VCOs identify increasing funding barriers which are both those facing all VCOs and additional and exceptional specific barriers.

Specific funding barriers include: the small number of funders willing to fund LGBT work; the lack of awareness amongst many funders of the different and specific needs of this community; fear on the part of funders of media and public reaction; institutionally adverse funding frameworks; and certain challenges related to the new localism agenda and London's geography and governance.

The experience of those LGBT VCOs that mobilise around 'compound' identities, for example: race and sexuality; family and sexuality; and disability and sexuality; and organisations working around Trans issues, have the least resources. Despite representing 31% of the sample, the mean spend of these groups is just £7,351 compared to £164,866 across the remainder of the study.

LGBT VCOs clearly articulate the case for 'community of interest' organisations, community development work and community confidence and capacity building.

Organisations and their communities are increasingly marginalised and under-funded as a result of funding barriers, institutional prejudice and low capacity to engage in strategic influence. This is a vicious circle that is threatening the sustainability of even medium sized organisations, (that is, those with expenditure levels between £100K and £500K). Whilst some targeted funding and targeted initiatives may aim to reach, for example, BME or disability organisations generally, the extent to which LGBT Black and minority ethnic and LGBT disability VCOs can benefit from such initiatives is clearly limited.

59% of all activity reported by VCOs is defined as service provision.

85% of LGBT VCOs operate outside a single borough boundary.

Collectively these findings suggest that organisations will struggle disproportionately to meet the locally driven funding framework, the public service delivery agenda and output funding requirements, especially those that are small. These organisations are therefore also inhibited in their relationships with local infrastructure, government and support.

### **History and experience**

Almost half of the sample consists of organisations that have formed since 1997.

The majority of these are not registered charities whilst over one third of the overall sample are registered charities.

One quarter of the organisations within the sample formed between 1977 and 1997 and these are those currently with the highest current mean incomes.

Organisations that have formed in the last decade are mostly those that are not registered charities, are 'community of interest' LGBT VCOs and have the lowest mean income.

The research did not target closed organisations nor attempt to do justice to a historical analysis, nevertheless there is a distinct period during which many of the now larger LGBT VCOs developed which coincides with the impact of the Greater London Council and funding for specific AIDS/HIV interventions.

Whilst funding streams that target AIDS/HIV-related work are identified as having enabled sector development these are now perceived to be under threat with increasing pressure from statutory health bodies for issues to be addressed within mainstream organisations.

The need to address health inequalities amongst the LGBT community is perceived to be ignored and undermined by statutory bodies and the potential for gaining funding for more community based initiatives is limited.

It is argued that the impact of AIDS/HIV related funding on the sector distorts the possibility for developing health interventions specific to and necessary for, as examples, lesbians and Black gay men.

Even where there is a demonstrated need for targeted services for some sub-sections of the LGBT community, and funding had formerly been available, this is currently under threat. Funding for specific LGBT interventions within the AIDS/HIV sector is currently under serious threat.

Practitioners and service users of LGBT VCOs are subject to prejudice and homophobia, for instance:

'we know that people are talking about...why [they might not want to] eat healthily or smoke less; they do not want to live to be old enough to have to be in the hands of the state as older queer people...they have talked to us about going back in the closet, some people who have been out all their lives, who [have] battled the military in the 50s and 60s for gay rights, who talk about feeling so vulnerable now that they...police what is on their walls and on their bookshelves' (I10)

'The two staff that went were absolutely shredded by these consultants. I mean hostile was barely a description of what went on. So we are very aware of the issue...There are changes to the law and then there is that lag in terms of social and emotional acceptance' (I10)

Many practitioners refer to their isolation and exclusion from the mainstream and the impact of constantly having their own identity open to public scrutiny in order to raise the issues and the need. There are very few non-LGBT champions of LGBT rights.

There is very specific and valuable understanding within the sector about issues of compound discrimination. This is demonstrated for example through explanations of the dual impact of racism and homophobia on an organisation attempting to gain infrastructure support, to influence policy, or to gain funding, when black or LGBT organisations are inaccessible due to lack of awareness of one or other form of prejudice.

There is intolerance, prejudice, racism and discrimination within the LGBT sector as well as outside of it. Disproportionate attention is given to lesbian and gay issues compared to bisexual and Trans issues.

### **Strategic engagement and influence**

The majority of LGBT VCOs have limited capacity to engage in the strategic and policy arenas and where individual organisations or partnerships have in the past made a concerted effort to raise policy issues these have not been taken on within the mainstream, support for continued work within the sector has not been forthcoming.

Despite high-level statements of recognition of the issues by funders, statutory officers and policy makers, this is not backed up by funding to support a sustainable sector.

Organisations have in the past exhausted their capacity in an attempt to influence policy. This results in both individual practitioner and organisation fatigue and is thought to be a consequence of institutional heterosexism and homophobia.

The majority of LGBT VCOs felt the importance of engaging with public policy and strategy and 91% said that they try to sway the public and influence government by providing information.

LGBT VCOs face distinct barriers to strategic engagement which include the following: absence of socio-economic and other data about LGBT people and lack of awareness of research about the issues originating from within the LGBT sector; superficial consultation processes; exclusive and discriminatory policy frameworks; growth of a funding and policy focus on neighbourhoods and localities; and geographic barriers to influence (for example the high likelihood that LGBT VCOs will cover more than one local authority boundary); low organisational capacity to engage; and an absence of a collaborative and representative voice within the sector.

An important barrier to sector engagement with policy is thought to be the high profile of Stonewall, a lobbying organisation that does not claim to be representative, nor to consult with the wider LGBT VCS, but is perceived by many external to the sector to be an authoritative and representative voice.

This means that organisations with very specific knowledge related to given policy areas, such as housing, parenting, age or race issues are excluded.

### **Infrastructure and support**

Just over half of LGBT VCOs have received non-financial support from a wide range of sources.

The largest source of support identified by LGBT VCOs is 'other LGBT VCOs'.

Very low levels of support are anticipated or accessed from Councils for Voluntary Service, Volunteer Bureaux and general second-tier organisations.

There is confusion about the role and capacity of the Consortium of LGBT VCOs (a national LGBT infrastructure organisation) and the extent to which they too consult with the sector.

Support needs identified include; overall sector development; support in gaining collective influence; networking support; organisation development and capacity building; and information, specifically funding information.

It is clear that the sector operates largely in isolation with mostly the few larger organisations accessing 'off the shelf' information and resources from mainstream infrastructure. Individual interviewees expressed extreme frustration about exclusion and denial of LGBT issues by named national infrastructure bodies.

More than half of interviewees expressed unconditional support for testing the feasibility of a London LGBT social action centre. The need for office space and premises is high amongst LGBT VCOs. The need for a physical and visible, accessible and diverse centre for collective action is widely supported whilst reservations are expressed by some.

There is currently a strong perception of an overall invisibility and absence of awareness, recognition, support and understanding about the LGBT VCS, its service users and the wider community.

### **Conclusion**

Today's climate is not enabling to LGBT VCOs, and the sector's engagement with infrastructure, policy and strategy is compromised. The voice of one or two organisations is taken to be that of the sector and much of the sector is marginalised.

Emergent policy therefore lacks specific grassroots and service expertise. The cycle of change whereby grassroots service experience and priorities are voiced to bring about strategic change, and therefore new funding for that work, is compromised and the sustainability of the sector is under threat.

VCOs, in particular smaller organisations, generally maintain a delicate balance in relation to their sustainability and their capacity to fund themselves. Clearly, the greater the number and impact of exclusions and barriers, the more complex this balance becomes and the greater the instability.

The LGBT sector cannot rely for evidence of need on mainstream research and data. There is very little advocacy or other influences that encourage this to happen. This, along with; the complex nature of the prejudice itself, changes in the operating environment and increasingly complex funding mechanisms, are threatening diversity, the sector's continued existence and its important role within the LGBT community.

That the sector has continued to deliver services under the conditions described is to the credit of organisations and practitioners, both large and small and to the considerable personal investment of individuals.

An effective infrastructure strategy for the LGBT sector must be led by, and at the same time, must resource, first-tier LGBT VCOs. A long-term vision will increase the likelihood of motivating and harnessing the expertise of the sector and gaining the support of government, mainstream infrastructure, policy makers and funders.

## **Recommendations**

The London LGBT sector needs to develop a long-term vision of its future. This will assist the sector to focus collectively on influencing change. This needs to be supported by a far more strategic approach to sustain and build the capacity of LGBT voluntary and community organisations which will require commitment from mainstream funders, infrastructure organisations, London government and strategy organisations.

The recommendations arising from this study are made to ChangeUp, the commissioner of this work, and to all organisations with a role and responsibility in ensuring equality and equal access to services and facilities. Those considered most immediate are listed below:

- Hold a London-based consultation about the issues raised in this report
- Disseminate findings and recommendations widely across government, the VCS, funders, statutory bodies and infrastructure
- Establish an accountable management body to manage and monitor the development of London LGBT infrastructure

- Explore options for immediate short-term strategic and development funding for first-tier LGBT VCOs
- Initiate studies that highlight the experience of ‘community of interest’ LGBT VCOs working on specific issues, for example race and parenting
- Develop appropriate and accessible capacity building and support for LGBT VCOs with a focus on widening access to the full range of income sources to the sector
- Carry out a collective and inclusive feasibility study for a London LGBT social action centre
- Explore and broker developmental partnerships between LGBT VCOs, funders and infrastructure organisations
- Initiate government research strategies to include appropriate studies, in partnership with the LGBT sector, about the health and social care needs of LGBT people and the health effects of discrimination
- Create sustainable and collective mechanisms for: identifying, developing and informing policy and research areas; building the evidence base; representing the sector and community issues; and development of a media strategy and voice

Reading of the full PiP report is recommended so as to gain a better understanding of the subtleties of this unique sector.

This ground-breaking study would not have been possible without the investment of the steering group, those interviewed and those who completed surveys. Details of all contributors are included in the full report.