



# Celebrating Intergenerational diversity among LGBT people

Executive Summary

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# Outline

This executive summary will summarise the key findings from an evidence review, evaluation report and toolkit which were undertaken as a result of three intergenerational LGBT projects. ILC-UK and Age UK have been working in partnership to explore the role of intergenerational projects for the LGBT community, the importance that these projects could have in supporting the LGBT population, and identifying key learning opportunities from studies conducted at the three projects.

Between Autumn 2010 and Spring 2011, three intergenerational projects took place that were among the first of their kind in the UK context. These projects aimed to promote solidarity and improved relations between different generations of the LGBT community. In Camden, arts workshops were held aimed at challenging stereotypes and social isolation. The project in Leicester used interviews conducted by younger participants to gather and record personal histories of older LGBT individuals. In Stockport different generations of LGBT people were involved in developing local policies, including raising their issues and experiences with local service providers. The projects aimed to share and learn new skills, improve understanding between younger and older people, foster mutual support and celebrate LGBT heritage.

ILC-UK have produced an evaluation of these projects, 'Celebrating Intergenerational Diversity', identifying the key learning points throughout the process of creating and running the sessions. This evaluation gathers evidence from key outcomes of the projects as well as data from semi-structured interviews with participants. In order to inform this work, ILC-UK also conducted an evidence review of existing work and projects concerned with the issues facing older (65+) and younger (under 25) LGBT individuals: 'Bridging the Gap: Exploring the potential for bringing older and younger LGBT people together'. The lessons learned both from the evidence review and the evaluation of the pilot projects have also been integrated into a toolkit for practitioners and policy makers to inspire the establishment and maintenance of future intergenerational projects for the LGBT community. The toolkit will be used to develop learning in this area and inspire future projects based on a foundation of evidence-based recommendations from these three initial projects and research from ILC-UK.

The idea for establishing an intergenerational LGBT project was conceived by Antony Smith (Age UK). This work was kindly supported by Pfizer and vinspired. The intergenerational projects were delivered in partnership with local Age UKs (Camden, Leicester and Stockport) and Gendered Intelligence (Camden), Leicester Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender Centre, and Stockport Youth Services. They also enlisted the help of other institutions including the Central School of Speech and Drama, the University of Leicester and the University of Salford to support their aims.

## The importance of an intergenerational focus in LGBT community projects

### What is intergenerational work?

Different generations can feel alienated from others, either through fear, mistrust or having a lack of contact with people from an age group different from their own. Intergenerational work covers a broad range of approaches with a common desire to bring members of

different generations together, as an end in itself, because ordinarily they do not get sufficient opportunity to engage in meaningful exchange. This work can have a variety of objectives, ranging from achieving educational outcomes to reducing social isolation. Past intergenerational projects have found greater successes if the activities run are based on areas of common interest for various groups. Examples of focuses for intergenerational work include:

- skills development
- knowledge sharing
- experience building
- social capital

Intergenerational projects have been on the rise in recent years, although with few seen across Europe or indeed internationally for the LGBT community. To the knowledge of the authors, the three pilot projects for this work are among the first in the UK, and represent an exciting frontier in improving solidarity between generations of LGBT individuals.

### Issues faced by older and younger groups of the LGBT community

Stonewall estimates that 5-7% of the UK population may be lesbian, gay or bisexual (therefore not including those who identify in other non-heterosexual ways or whose gender differs from the one assigned at birth). Older and younger age groups within the LGBT community may experience different issues related to their gender identity and sexuality. LGBT individuals have been found to be at a higher risk of social isolation, physical and mental ill-health in contrast to their heterosexual peers. Older members of this group are less likely to have families, and the associated support and social relationships with younger generations from familial contact, as they become frailer and lose independence.

While there are differences in the issues faced by younger and older LGBT generations, and the community is by no means homogenous, there are a number of concerns and experiences shared between groups:

- Higher risk of mental ill-health, including loneliness, depression and substance abuse
- Greater likelihood of having a lifestyle which poses risks to health, including engaging in risky sexual behaviour, in addition to elevated cigarette and alcohol consumption
- Experiences of marginalisation within families and communities and in the worst cases bullying and harassment
- Lack of independence, having to rely either on teachers and others for younger people or on carers for older individuals who may not be sympathetic to their sexual or gender orientation.
- Poor responses from service providers, such as health, care and educational institutions, whether it is in the form of overt discrimination or unsympathetic treatment.

### The role of intergenerationally-focussed LGBT community work

The LGBT community is like any other, with some issues of tension between generations. For example, within the LGBT community, accusations of ageism are common – older men in particular often report feeling alienated from a younger group whom they perceive to focus too much on appearance (body fascism). In addition, some consider the younger generation naïve in their activism. Meanwhile younger LGBT people have reported feeling

the older generation is out of touch and fighting old battles. In addition some suggest they are wary that older LGBT people only see them through a sexual lens.

Intergenerational projects have previously been found to be successful in promoting solidarity between generations, but little work has been done to explore their potential in the context of the LGBT community. In the context of wider society, the two groups live side by side in communities, so programmes designed to address negative perceptions and stereotypes have an inherent rationale. Attempts to reduce feelings of alienation between younger and older LGBT individuals within the LGBT community may also have a welcome effect on older LGBT people's feelings of loneliness and isolation, and give younger LGBT people greater social support and role models.

## Overview of projects

Combined, the projects sought to engage with up to 50 older and 50 younger participants from across the LGBT community. This aim was broadly met, and each project engaged with between 20-30 participants each.

Project	Camden	Leicester	Stockport
<b>Number of Older Participants Engaged</b>	15	8	10
<b>Number of Younger Participants Engaged</b>	15	13	18
<b>Total Number of Participants</b>	30	21	28

*Leicester were still recruiting participants at the time of writing*

### Leicester

**Interviewer:** *What do you hope to get out of this project and especially from the contact with older LGBT people?*

**Respondent:** *Understanding properly what it means to be a gay man.*

#### Younger gay man, Leicester project

The LGBT intergenerational project for Leicester was developed as a local LGBT history project. The project was delivered by Leicester LGBT Centre, a voluntary organisation established to support the local LGBT community in Leicester city which also provides county wide support to Leicestershire and Rutland.

The Centre recruited younger volunteers to help interview older members of the local LGBT community. The aim was to record changes in everyday life over the years, to bring younger and older LGBT people together, and to enable both generations to interact with the aim of improving their understanding of the LGBT history.

Participants on this project reported that they were appreciative of being able to contribute to their community, as there was a perceived void of LGBT material in local history archives. As well as improving confidence levels, this project also enabled participants to develop their own skills, particularly the younger people who received training on conducting the interviews with the older group.

This project recruited some participants in their 30s and 40s, as well as the intended under-25s and over-50s, meaning that it was able to develop a multigenerational approach, something that was welcomed by the participants. Unique to the project in Leicester, further funding has been received, meaning that this project will be able to continue for a further three years.

### Camden

*For many people the family environment is a heterosexual set up and so if you are a younger person who is LGBT you are not going to have that kind of conversation with your grandparents, people from different generations and I think there is some value bringing LGBT people together across generations to share some of those exchanges to basically form bonds in the way you do within family life and vice versa.*

#### Project worker, Camden project

Age Concern Camden (London) in partnership with Gendered Intelligence intended to work with younger (under 25) and older (over 50) LGBT people on a series of art workshops. Four workshops were delivered aimed at challenging stereotypes and social isolation faced by older and younger people across London, and fostering relationships between them in a creative way. The project brought together older LGBT people who mainly identified as lesbian or gay with younger people who identified themselves through a wide spectrum of sexual and gender identities.

The framing of projects with a general arts background allowed the content of the workshops to be quite flexible, with some people, particularly the older group, preferring to use more traditional art techniques, with others using modern technology such as film in their pieces. Participants were positive about having a final outcome, as it provided a focus for their time in the project. Some felt that art-based work allowed people to reveal private emotions and thoughts in a less public way and members of the group felt more comfortable being open as a result.

Although all projects resulted in an increased knowledge among the group about support available for the LGBT community in their local area, over half of participants on the Camden project reported that their knowledge had improved about the services on offer.

### Stockport

*There is a lot of ageism but not just towards older people, but also coming from older people towards younger people. I think we need to work on this gap between them.*

#### Older gay man, Stockport project

The Stockport intergenerational project was delivered as an advocacy and research project to explore and communicate the needs of the LGBT community to the local service providers and beyond. In doing so, the project aimed to involve different generations of LGBT people in developing local policies alongside service providers. The research element of the project focused on five key areas: homelessness and housing, workplace and education, health and healthcare, hate crime and alcohol and drugs.

Two researchers were recruited to train participants in research methods and techniques, which resulted in the distribution and analysis of questionnaires. These questionnaires also served as the basis for follow up qualitative work in the form of a focus group and a workshop that brought service users together with service providers.

The Stockport participants took the initiative and developed an additional, unplanned element to the work, a 'speed dating' workshop, which consisted of younger and older people sharing information on their experiences with service providers, and other issues and experiences. The research results also formed the basis for a drama piece, consisting of a number of vignettes aimed at highlighting the challenges experienced by both younger and older LGBT participants. This was presented at the final celebration event.

This advocacy project allowed LGBT individuals to directly engage with services providers to raise issues specific to the community. Many people felt that this contemporary, action-focussed approach was a positive element of this project. This project has led to the development of an LGBT toolkit for social support that outlines the challenges facing LGBT and the response needed by service providers.

## Outcomes of projects and key learning opportunities

### 1. Unifying a diverse community.

All three projects successfully attracted younger and older people from across the LGBT spectrum. For many participants, not only was this a novel experience in terms of participating on a project with a person of a different generation, but also in terms of participation on a project with a diverse spectrum of people with different gender identities and sexual orientations. All three projects created a platform for dialogue between groups that have historically been disparate in nature.

#### Example evidence:

*I was quite pleased really because I usually only choose to socialise with women and lesbians. So I was quite pleased that I was doing this because I was just stretching myself a bit. I found it okay, because it's not in your face because you're both focussing on something you do and it's not turned into a big thing or anything.*

#### Older Lesbian Woman, Camden project

**Importance:** Through bringing together contrasting groups that identify as LGBT these projects and similar future work can help to increase the cohesiveness of the LGBT community. Improving the cohesiveness of the LGBT community can help to strengthen efforts to achieve equality and transform attitudes.

### 2. Reducing age stereotypes.

All three projects succeeded in reducing pre-existing stereotypes that some participants held about people of a different generation. For many participants, this was their first experience of working on a community project with people from a different generation, and the experience helped to illuminate the commonalities between generations.

#### Example evidence:

*...I thought that older people were rude and not approachable, I don't know why, but they are not like that.*

#### Younger gay man, Stockport project

**Importance:** Many facets of LGBT culture are perceived to be structured along age lines, and many aspects of LGBT culture are perceived to be inaccessible to older

LGBT people. Reducing age stereotypes helps to increase the cohesiveness of groups identifying as LGBT and provide a unified voice in efforts to achieve equality and transform societal attitudes more generally. Furthermore, reducing age stereotypes can help to increase intergenerational exchanges, which holds additional benefits, some of which were outlined earlier while others are described below.

### 3. Development of social skills and confidence.

Participants across all three projects reported improved levels of confidence. This was applicable to both young and older participants in communicating with those of a different generation, as well as confidence in dealing with social situations more generally.

#### Example evidence:

*It has certainly given me a lot of confidence as well, working in a group and with younger people and other older people, different gender people.*

#### Older lesbian woman, Camden project

*I suppose I trust people more than before and I am coming out of my shell.*

#### Younger gay man, Stockport project

**Importance:** For both younger and older people, communicating with service providers will often be synonymous with communicating with people of a different generation. Improving confidence in communicating with people of a different generation may benefit participants' negotiation skills with service providers. Some literature also links happiness and wellbeing with confidence and self-esteem.

### 4. Development of practical skills.

Participants across all three projects were exposed to training and were mentored in the development of various skills. In Camden this represented improved skills and knowledge of the arts. In Leicester, this represented improved skills in terms of interview techniques, research methodology and methods used in historical research. In Stockport, skill development focussed on building capacity in terms of research methodology. In all three projects, training was delivered by academic staff from noted academic institutions.

#### Example evidence:

*I have already done one interview and it went really well. I did that with Colin from Leicester University and it was a fantastic training.*

#### Younger gay man, Leicester project

**Importance:** Training delivered by academics and other experts in the field will provide some grounding in the subjects outlined. Skill development can enhance employability of participants as well as providing a springboard for further training or education.

### 5. Exposure of young LGBT people to older LGBT role models.

Younger LGBT people were exposed to older LGBT people who were successful in their career or in life more generally and were comfortable in their identity. In essence, younger people were exposed to older LGBT people who could represent role models. Many parts of the training in practical skills was delivered by academics and other experts who identified as LGBT; for some young LGBT people this was the first time that they had realised that being LGBT did not represent a barrier to success

**Example evidence:**

*Project worker: So when we went to the university did you think Simon was gay - did you think it was possible to be a professor and be gay?*

*Participant: Well, no I didn't really, not before.*

**Dialogue between project worker and young lesbian woman, Stockport project**

**Importance:** A growing body of literature has highlighted the paucity of role models available to LGBT young people. The availability of role models that reflect the demographic and personal characteristics of young models has been linked elsewhere as a determinant of future academic and career success.

**6. Improved understanding of the needs of older and younger LGBT people.**

The project in Stockport involved conducting an analysis of the needs of older and younger LGBT people in the local areas. However, the project went much further through presenting this research directly to local service providers. The project established a number of workshops where the views and needs of local older and younger LGBT people were presented directly to service providers across a range of different services including those responsible for providing housing, education providers, health service providers, those involved in preventing hate crime, and those providing services for those with alcohol and drugs issues. These views and discussions were recorded and amalgamated with the results of the research into a toolkit for service providers to respond to the needs of LGBT people.

**Example evidence:**

see toolkit available from Age UK (Stockport)

**Importance:** Our own literature review highlighted the challenges that LGBT people face in negotiating equitable and tailored treatment from service providers from across the spectrum. The creation of a toolkit outlining the needs of LGBT people of all ages will serve as a guide for service providers in planning and delivering services to LGBT people in Stockport and beyond.

**7. Preservation and increased awareness of LGBT history.**

The intergenerational project in Leicester specifically focussed on collecting oral histories from the local LGBT population. This information will be used to form a repository of oral history, as well as forming the basis of a local exhibition. This was the first time that the lives and experiences of older LGBT people had been systematically collected in the area, one of few such projects in the country, and possibly the only one where these histories were collected by younger LGBT people. While history was not the focus of the projects in Camden or Stockport, these projects also involved younger LGBT people learning about the lives and experiences of older people.

**Example evidence:**

*It's true that there isn't any documentation or anything on LGBT history so hopefully with this project we can do something about that.*

**Younger transgender woman, Leicester project**

**Importance:** LGBT history has traditionally been overlooked, a possible reflection of the lack of civil liberties experienced by LGBT people in the recent past. The numbers

of LGBT people who were involved in World War II, for example, may now be dwindling, and their histories as LGBT people in the war may be lost without preservation as the stories of LGBT people are not represented in many archives. Additionally, history can be a valuable tool for assessing progress in terms of achieving equality and awareness for LGBT people, and to highlight the challenges that lie ahead.

**8. Sharing lifecourse experiences.**

The intergenerational dimension was viewed as particularly helpful to young people in sharing experiences and dealing with coming out to family and friends. In the literature, coming out was highlighted as a difficult stage in life for most LGBT people, although particularly for transgender people who, in some cases, faced a double coming out as initially identifying as lesbian or gay before realising their transgender identity creating a second wave of rejection and confrontation. In this research, young transgender people also talked about the ways in which meeting older LGBT people helped deal with coming out.

**Example evidence:**

*If someone in my situation as trans comes and says they need to find something vital, like how to tell parents, for example, and see how people did it in the past and how they reacted to their parents' reactions. You'll find people who've been excommunicated by their parents, but you see that you survive it...it's not the end of the world if it happens.*

**Young transgender woman, Leicester project**

**Importance:** Coming out is one of the most difficult lifecourse experiences that young LGBT people will face. However, some studies indicate that individuals who disclose their sexual identity have higher levels of wellbeing. The intergenerational approach adopted in these projects helped younger LGBT discuss ways of overcoming challenges in coming out with those who had experience.

**9. Promote the visibility of the LGBT community.**

All three projects undertook exhibitions and dissemination activities to showcase the work of the projects to the LGBT community and beyond. In doing so, the projects highlight that intergenerational work among LGBT people can not only improve understanding within the LGBT community, but can also help to educate and promote awareness within wider society about the LGBT community.

**Example evidence:**

see project descriptions

**Importance:** The LGBT community has traditionally occupied a marginalised societal position and LGBT individuals have not enjoyed many of the freedoms enjoyed by non-LGBT people. Intergenerational projects can represent one way of highlighting the diversity of the LGBT community and its history and raise awareness of current and future needs.

# Recommendations



- 1. Further work is needed to understand the benefits of intergenerational work among the LGBT community.** These projects represent some of the first ones known to involve the whole spectrum of the LGBT community on an intergenerational basis. Further research and the development of new projects in different settings is needed to understand the benefits of this approach.
- 2. Youth services and older people's networks in a time of cuts.** The success of intergenerational projects is often dependent on involving existing youth and older people's networks. The 2010 Spending Review has seen a huge cut in funding to Local Authorities that has equated to a cut in services for young people and older people alike. Future intergenerational work will suffer without existing youth groups and older people's networks to form the basis of intergenerational projects. We would call for the preservation of youth services and funding for older people's networks, such as those included in these projects, and for greater recognition of the vital role they play. In the case of services for young people, the closure of youth groups was partially attributed by some as one contributory factor to the 2011 riots.
- 3. Localism and marginalised groups.** The Localism Bill includes statements about the value of community assets, although without specific provision, we may see neighbourhoods where these assets transfer only to those causes and groups that are more popular or vocal, which in many contexts may not include LGBT groups. The Localism Bill should include greater safeguards to ensure that the rights of marginalised or minority populations to access a full range of amenities and services locally are protected.
- 4. Focus on soft skills.** Many of the outcomes resulting from the intergenerational projects included in this evaluation represent soft-skills. Furthermore, intergenerational projects, by their very nature, are often based on the development of social relationships primarily. This can make intergenerational work appear unattractive at first from a funding perspective, particularly in a tough climate of spending cuts. However, developing soft skills is critical to achieving many positive 'hard' outcomes such as changes in employment status or health. We would call for greater recognition of the value of soft outcomes that may result from projects such as those included here.
- 5. Funding of intergenerational work.** In 2009 the government at the time launched a £5.5 million programme of funding for intergenerational work to be spread out over two years. However, recent events in summer 2011 highlight the need to continue this tranche of work and to continue to develop intergenerational relations. We would call for specific funding to be set aside for projects that aim to strengthen intergenerational relations. Furthermore, this funding should be allocated on a quota basis to ensure that all groups, including LGBT groups, are able to access this funding.

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