

pace



promoting lesbian and gay health and wellbeing

Guidelines for best practice in LGB youth work.

Introduction

The following guidelines have been produced by PACE youth service. They have been aimed at providing workers who wish to work with young lesbians, bisexuals and gay men, a set of standards that will make for a quality youth service provision. We have also included several examples of our work that workers may find useful and can be adapted to suit your project

The guidelines have been produced with the help and input from various agencies nationally and with workers and young people themselves.

They have been designed to address the needs arising from young people we have worked with directly, they also highlight common themes identified by experienced youth workers, in this specialised field.

The work of PACE

PACE's mission is to promote emotional, physical, and mental health well being of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals from diverse groups and cultural backgrounds, through the provision of a wide range of quality services provided by lesbians and gay men. We are now the leading London provider of mental health services to this community.

The youth service has been part of PACE for two years and aims to provide a more holistic approach to young people's health, that includes promoting good mental health. Most of PACE services are free to users and currently we offer seven services, counselling, groupwork, advocacy, employment, family therapy, HIV prevention, and youthwork.

The youth work service is run by a team of five and operates from venues in North London, though its service is open to all young people under 25 in all London boroughs and surrounding counties. We also provide satellite services at other venues in south London.

The PACE youth service has become the largest provider of services to young LGB people in London.

Mental Health and Young People

Our own and others evidence shows that often young people are not attracted to services which they perceive as being adult in their structure or content. In order to be fully accessible to young people we have to develop ways of working which are attractive to them and also to reach out more to where they are.

(See Mental Health Foundation report Bright Future on young peoples mental health)

This means we have developed a youth service which is not deemed 'mental health' in its design, but which addresses their emotional and mental health needs. It also provides a signpost or channel for them to access other

appropriate mental health services if necessary. This also means working closely with other lesbian and gay projects and mainstream youth provision.

Partnerships and Funding

Current partnerships include;
Haringey Teenage Pregnancy Unit,
Haringey Community Safety Forum,
The Pan- London Network of LGB youthworkers,
Islington Social Services Leaving Care team,
Connexions: Barnet, and Enfield.
Alcohol East
Mortimer Market GUM services,
and Mind Camden
Zone 15 Gay Men's GU Clinic
The Lesbian and Gay Business Association
Camden and Islington Health Promotion Service, Gay Men's Team
The London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival
Jackson's Lane Community Theatre
331 Young Peoples Advice Centre
The National Network of LGB youthworkers

Funding is received for the youth service in 2000-2003 from

Diana Princess of Wales Memorial Fund
Haringey Primary Care Trust
Barnet Primary Care Trust
London Borough of Haringey
Healthy Action Zone

PACE YOUNG PEOPLES STEERING GROUP MEMBERS:

PAUL
NOBU
WAYNE
MARK
SAMANTHA
EMMA
MONIKA
JAY
ANGEL
KIA
GEORGE
JAKE

Initial recommendations and observations

Throughout our work at our youth groups: First Move, OneUP, Girldiva and Outzone, we have continued to develop the range of services to young people based on their needs. Engaging effectively with young LGB people and listening to their diverse needs have enabled us to achieve this.

It is also due to having skilled staff that are open to reflecting, analysing and continually improving their work, to meet the changing needs of young people we work with.

Our most successful work results from spending time listening and talking to young people we work with. This is the vital key to any good practice recommendations, as well having workers who can utilise their skills in developing sound ideas and taking them forward.

The following basic recommendations are made from our research:

Clients or service users

- Work with young LGB people should be based on principles of equality, respect and trust.
- The safety of the group and all its members should be paramount to working with LGB people, as this group are more at risk from negative responses to their sexuality if exposed.
- Specific projects and agencies should develop locally to support young LGB people, and to provide information advice and safe spaces for exploring further issues and needs.

Delivery of Service:

- The project aims and objectives should be clear and transparent for all. It should define the work and the clients you expect to work with.
- The service should be clear about who is delivering the work and defining their sexuality.
- Any advice or information given to young LGB people should be up to date and accurate, and be accessible to all.
- Young LGB people and staff need to develop partnerships with other relevant agencies to provide a sign-posting and referral system for the clients they work with.

Staff team:

- The service should strive to represent lesbian, gay, bisexual people that reflect the whole LGB community.
- The service should attract workers from diverse backgrounds and ages including volunteers.
- Partnerships should be developed with young LGB people, and those working with them, to enable maximum benefit to young people.
- Working with young LGB people needs appropriately trained and skilled staff.
- Staff working with LGB people need appropriate clinical support and managerial support.
- Staff working with all young people need on-going training to develop an awareness of issues facing young LGB people, to develop their skills and challenge heterosexist and homophobic attitudes in practice.

Monitoring and Evaluations

- Recording and monitoring of all aspects of the work should be available for internal and external evaluation.
- Monitoring should include views and feedback from young people who use or have previously used your service, this should be regulated throughout the development of the project.

Through our work we have also delivered training to youth workers who wish to expand their knowledge of working with LGB young people. (Please see our training programme plan and exercises on appendix 6)

The following recommendations are made regarding training for external professionals.

- Planning of the training should first identify the training needs of the group or individuals through face-to-face consultation.
- Workers providing the training should work on the principles of equality, respect and trust and those receiving the training should also abide by these principles.

- Workers delivering this training should have experience of groupwork with adults and knowledge of how to challenge heterosexist and homophobic attitudes effectively.
- The training should encompass factual information as well as practical support and ideas for workers to use in their own settings.
- All training programmes should be updated and monitored and written records should be maintained for future use.

Throughout our research we have found it difficult to obtain written examples of previous work undertaken by other LGB projects. It is imperative that all projects record their work for reference, and make this available for others to use where appropriate. In all our work, it is recognised that 'taking risks' and trying new ventures is crucial if we are to continue to develop our services. Projects or pieces of work that may have not been as successful as we hoped have provided invaluable lessons to our work, which has then led to improved services for young LGB people. It is important for all projects and individuals to reflect honestly on their work, and use all of this information positively for the future.

Funding recommendations

Funding of LGB youth work provision and (especially mental health provision) is very sporadically spread nationally. In our research we have discovered many innovative funding partnerships, which have enabled LGB youth work to thrive.

It is increasingly common for funding sources to be made up of several different funders. Historically LGB youth provision has often been born out of HIV/AIDS funds, with this decreasing it is vital for all projects to build strong links with other partners and research their funding strategy thoroughly.

Some of our recommendations to date are:

- Develop a funding strategy and circulate to all interested parties for feedback and advice, including young people.
- Undertake training on funding and how to submit successful funding applications.
- Use the Internet to research your topic and funding applications, use as much national and local information to support your bid as possible.
- Ask other projects who have been successful about how they obtained funding.

Funding for this work is so diverse is it very difficult for us to make definitive recommendations that will apply to your area of work or the needs of your local LGB young people.

The need for projects and workers to record their work becomes more vital, when applying for funding and developing their work. In our experience building up data about your clients and your work cannot be underestimated. *Please see our funding strategy chart as an example in appendix **
We strongly recommend you record the following basic statistics about your work:

- All the young people you work with in any setting; by phone, in person, in groups, on the scene, outreach etc.
- The demographics of the clients you work with.
- The issues raised by young LGB people you work with.
- The referrals you make to other agencies and the time spent on individual work with young LGB people.
- Work undertaken with partners or associated links, for example, schools, police, or parents.
- How young people access your services, as this will provide valuable insight in how to reach your target audience effectively.

*Please see our recording mechanisms pro-formo in appendix **

Advertising and Funding

We have successfully attracted young people to our groups by securing funding for advertising in our funding bids and to produce the literature, which sells our services. This has enabled us to maintain high numbers of young people using our service, which of course increases the potential, to attract further long term funding and develop the work.

We have also utilised young people skills in developing our media and resources and have taken advice from young people themselves in developing materials aimed at LGB communities.

Issues arising from young people

Many of the issues raised by young people we work with have included all aspects of their lives: coming out, depression, attitudes, health, employment, families and relationships. Of course many of the issues would be common for all young people, like, drugs and alcohol, the law, health, leaving home, and we recognise that many of the issues are part of any young persons development. The following is a summary of key issues that we have identified as prominent for young lesbians, bisexuals and gay men.

Coming Out

This is probably the most difficult aspect of young LGB people's lives and impacts on many other issues they face. LGB people have to continue coming out all their lives, to teachers, families, employees, doctors, etc. For many young people who access our services they have already begun to think about this process, and the impact this will have on their lives. It is vital that workers understand the need for every individual to explore this as fully as they can before they decide to come-out.

Our group work programme offers a varied selection of 'coming out' workshops and discussions, which aim to provide a range of options for all participants to learn from each other's experience. Breaking down the key areas for discussions with young people in groups has enabled them to consider their own experience more fully. We have also included other professionals and non-professionals to discuss their experience of coming out and to present a representation from a diverse community.

It also important for workers to feel able to discuss freely with young people their own experiences of coming out, as young people have often not met an 'out' lesbian or gay man before arriving at LGB services.

Depression

Young LGB are more likely to suffer from depression, and low self esteem due to societies attitudes towards their sexuality. In our service we have seen an increase in young people who we have identified as suffering from depression, eating disorders, self-harming, and suicidal feelings. Working in groups with these young people may not be appropriate and workers need to make an assessment of the young person, and explain the purposes of the group clearly. In our experience many have benefited from attending the groups for peer support. However, many young people can identify with these feelings and can offer valuable shared experience, which can assist in dealing with mental health problems.

Successful work has also meant providing on-going one to one support for those workers, and offering more formalised counselling to those who request it. We have found that young people respond well to one to one sessions if

they can be accessed quickly, (though often it is difficult to for young people to maintain appointments regularly) Offering a listening or befriending service can benefit the young person whilst waiting for formalised counselling to begin. It must be clear to the young person that you are not entering into a counselling contract and that workers feel able to get the support from managers and their team for this work.

Workers need to be clear of their limitations and recognise that a large group may not be able assist those individuals with deep emotional or psychological problems. Adequate referral systems should be in place and workers should ascertain referral services that are appropriate for young LGB people to use in confidence.

Attitudes

All young LGB people we work with have felt that the attitudes of many people they came across, lead to feeling negative about being gay and lesbian. LGB people themselves also compound this and often many of the young people will harbour internalised homophobia that prevents their development.

Workers should build a programme that reflects all aspects of being lesbian and gay and should challenge young people perceptions of LGB communities through discussion. A balanced programme that may even conform to some stereotypes of the LGB communities is needed if acceptance of our own community is to be embraced by all. Prejudices of workers can often hinder this process and all workers need to be aware of their own discrimination and internalised homophobic attitudes.

Working with young lesbians and gay men, as two very different groups with different needs should also be addressed by workers. It may be appropriate at times to work in single gender groups.

In our research we have found younger LGB people (under 19) request mixed gender work, and want services that are open to male and females equally.

Schools

Many of the issues raised here are around homophobic attitudes towards LGB people by staff and other pupils. There is also evidence highlighting the lack of information regarding sex education and relationships. The average ages of young people feeling different from other pupils varied dramatically in our studies, but for most by the age of 13 and before puberty, was highlighted. The period between them feeling different and talking to someone about it was lengthy often 3-4 years. This can lead to feelings of isolation, depression, low self-esteem, self-hate, anxiety and suicide.

In our experience we have found that young people who attend our groups are able to build up their own independent peer support groups within the membership of the group. This has led to them being able to get support from other young people away from the school environment. Often gay and lesbian youth workers are asked to work with schools to provide training or PHSE lessons on sexuality. We recommend that this work starts with teachers

as this then leads to teachers themselves taking on the work with their students, which will send a message to students about the schools policy on homophobic bullying. There is now a great deal of written quality work within schools on sexuality issues.

Health

Concerns over young LGB People's health varied enormously within our studies. It is also apparent that many health issues are very different for men and women. Young women would often hate the way medical staff would assume they are straight and this would make them feel awkward when visiting GPs etc. Young men would be subject to very complicated messages around sexual health practice and HIV and AIDS and would often get bombarded with this at their first contact with LGB youth projects. It was also felt that resources for young lesbians around any health issues were lacking and especially around sexual health and relationships.

All information provided by workers should be appropriate for the young people you work with. Information regarding health issues can be delivered in many formats and through innovative programmes that include, videos, guest speakers, using drama, art, or storytelling. In our project we have incorporated these elements to make for a diverse programme that will enable discussion and debate amongst our groups.

We have also provided a range of information via our web site, which young people have advised on.

Working with young people on a one to one basis can establish how much information that young people know around the subject matter themselves.

Relationships

In our research this is highlighted as a key issue for young LGB people. All young people we work with, identified that that meeting other LGB people was the most important factor when using services. Most wanted to know how many, young people may attend you group session, and wanted to meet specifically people from the same age range. This is more prevalent in under 19s who often did not feel so comfortable accessing group sessions if the majority of members were older than them.

It is important for workers to build relationship with young people that are open and transparent to all. Young people will see LGB youthworkers as role-models and mentors and this is often unique to LGB youth provision. Due to the relationships formed by workers and young people (often spanning several years) it is important for all workers to be aware of guidelines. For a copy of these please see appendix # (which are also given to young people when entering their project or services we provide). This is part of our welcome pack, which I (also in appendix#) that all young people receive who attend our group sessions.

Sexual relationships between young people are inevitable and should be allowed to develop if appropriate, though it should be clear that this is not the primary function of the group. Open and honest discussion amongst staff and

young people about the sexual relationships should be encouraged as part of the programme. Staff should discuss their roles and thoughts in the team before they engage in this work.

For many young LGB people exploring issues around sex and relationships has not developed in the same way as their heterosexual peers. Time for discussion and personal development around these issues is needed, in a safe and facilitated environment by experienced staff.

Employment

There were many issues raised by the group around employment. The main one being the fear of being 'outed' at work or who to tell at work about their sexuality. There was considerable peer pressure from colleagues to be heterosexual.

Often young LGB people would discuss employment opportunities that they felt would be more accepting of their sexuality. Supporting individuals to make choices that challenge this negative and limiting option should be part of your programme. Asking other professionals from LGB business associations to speak to young people can be of great benefit, as well as explaining Lesbian and Gay employment rights, which can equip young people to feel more empowered about their work choices.

Families

All of the young people we work in our group sessions have highlighted their family as an area that can create great anxiety and emotions regarding their sexuality.

Often young LGB people will begin living a 'double-life' and suppressing their sexuality or hiding their sexuality altogether from their families. This causes immense stress and pressure for LGB young people and to adopt heterosexual roles.

For the majority of LGB people 'coming out' to your family is sighted as the most difficult part of the coming out process (or perceived the most difficult). Providing information and sharing experiences of this process with others will enable young LGB people to choose the right time to come out to their family. Providing information that represents families' ethnic, cultural and faith backgrounds is also needed for young LGB people.

Services may also provide information to parents or carers of LGB young people, or make referrals to supporting agencies, as a way of supporting the young person.

All workers should be clear that their work is confidential and is not discussed with parents or carers unless the young person consents to this.

The following recommendations are made as a model of good practice.

We believe that all Lesbian, Bisexuals and Gay men have the right to

- The skills and capacity to direct their own lives
- The right to have their own life experience valued
- The right to make real choices about every aspect of their lives
- The right and responsibility to be active citizens.
- The right to be equal members of society
- Be consulted and informed about any decisions affecting their lives
- Be Included in decision making processes

Engaging and valuing young LGB people in your services:

- Recruit young LGB people through outreach and or through media or publications they may access, including the Internet.
- Provide comfortable and accessible environments for young people to meet.
- Provide an environment that is physically and emotionally safe for young people and workers to meet in.
- Provide appropriate staffing for the groups or individuals you work with, and for staff to work in pairs during group sessions.
- Provide a young people's forum or space to discuss their fears and expectations of the service or groups, and develop a working contract that will be kept under constant review.
- Spend time on developing relationship with young people in groups and with the workers.
- Allow the project to develop over a reasonable time, funding must be for more than one year, as it will not produce significant take up of services by young people, in the first 12 months.
- Provide social activities on a regular basis, to compliment the group.
- Provide services that can diversify and work with other partners to provide a range of services.
- Services that utilise young peoples own talents and skills and encourage young people to volunteer on various levels.

- Services should provide clear and concise information regarding their provision and clearly outlining their aims.
- Setting up an advisory or steering group made up of young people and others with relevant skills, knowledge and expertise, that will inform practice, and ensure good quality analysis, reflection, evaluation and support for staff and volunteers.
- Provide services and publications that depict positive images and role models of the LGB community.