

SUPPORTING
LESBIAN, GAY,
BISEXUAL AND
TRANSGENDER
COMMUNITIES

CODE OF PRACTICE

FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

FAMILY RESOURCE CENTRES

AND URBAN PARTNERSHIPS/INTEGRATED COMPANIES



The Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, The Family Support Agency and POBAL would like to thank GLEN (Gay & Lesbian Equality Network) for their help in drafting this Code of Practice and the work of the Network of CDPs, FRCs & RSA Supporting Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans Communities (West & Midlands Region), facilitated by West Training and Development Ltd. which framed the original Code of Practice on which this current code is based.



Cover and pages 4 & 8: Cork Pride 2009. Photos: Rainer Tenhunen www.aihio.net

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COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

The Community Development Programme (CDP) provides financial assistance to community development projects in disadvantaged areas. It also provides support for self-help work to specific target groups that experience disadvantage for example, lone parents, Travellers, people with disabilities, elderly people who live in isolation and those who are marginalized or excluded from mainstream society in any way. Projects are managed by a voluntary board of management drawn from the local community who have experienced poverty or social exclusion themselves. One of their key achievements has been in providing community leadership and a local focus for the delivery of community facilities.

Life has improved for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in the last 20 years and our society has seen huge change. Not so long ago, the only norm that many in Ireland recognised was that of a heterosexual couple. Now, as a society, we are becoming more comfortable with many forms of partnership and family structure, and our definition of what is “normal” has widened and evolved to become much more inclusive.

However, many lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender members of society still experience intolerance, discrimination or inequality. Many feel that they need to hide their sexual orientation and gender identity for fear of negative reactions from the people around them. Ireland today should be a place where all LGBT people can feel safe and confident about being open about their sexual orientation at home, in work and within the wider community; where LGBT people are not discriminated against in laws and in service provision; where relationships between LGBT people are seen as no different to relationships between heterosexual people. Every individual member of the community should feel that they belong to that community, and can contribute to and share in the benefits and progress made. If any individual member feels excluded or marginalized from society, then the whole community is at a loss for that.

Society must provide the environment where an individual is given the opportunity and encouragement to reach his or her full potential. This code of practice will go a long way towards helping to foster that environment by promoting awareness and understanding of the needs of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people through the Community Development Programme and other social inclusion programmes.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES RESOURCE CENTRE PROGRAMME

The visibility of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender communities within Irish society has increased greatly in recent times. However, it is clear from the introduction to this Code of Practice that many barriers still suppress and discourage the full inclusion of LGBT people in Irish schools, workplaces and communities. Not only do these barriers exclude and isolate LGBT people but also act to deprive society-at-large of the breadth and depth of talent that LGBT people have to contribute.

The aim of the Family and Community Services Resource Centre Programme is to combat disadvantage and improve the function of the family unit. In pursuit of this aim, the programme has expanded to comprise over 100 Family Resource Centres (FRCs) nationwide. Central to the success of each FRC is the involvement of people from marginalised groups in all aspects of project activity. The Family Support Agency regards the full implementation of this Code of Practice as a vital step toward making each FRC a more LGBT friendly place to work, volunteer or visit.

The actions outlined within this Code of Practice are sensible, achievable and, above all, practical. Each action was identified by the staff and volunteers of CDPs, FRCs and their Regional Support Agency and is informed by first-hand experience acquired through working within voluntary organisations at local community level. The role of the Network of CDPs, FRCs & RSA Supporting LGBT Communities (West & Midlands Region) was fundamental in coordinating the production of this Code.

The nature of the Code's development – where staff and volunteers of individual projects worked together to develop a resource based on experiences acquired locally but applicable across programmes at a national level – is a ringing endorsement of the working culture manifest within these programmes and further demonstrates the value of community development as a developmental approach.

While the development of this Code of Practice may be a success in itself, its implementation across the three programmes will represent a real and meaningful step toward achieving greater inclusion for all within Irish society.

POBAL

Supporting the equality and inclusion of groups experiencing discrimination, disadvantage and exclusion is central to the work of Pobal and its beneficiary organisations. Sexual orientation and the expression of that orientation is a fundamental right that should be accommodated within a mature liberal society that recognises diversity and values the contribution and needs of all its citizens and residents. While discrimination against people on the grounds of sexual orientation is quite rightly outlawed under the Equality Legislation, non-discrimination and the exercise of rights and equalities is something that also needs to be actively pursued and systematically implemented to compliment the legal framework.

Pobal has been involved in several initiatives designed to embed a social inclusion focus on Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual people within its programmes. This work has been undertaken through programme supports as well as being reflected in programme guidelines and in the production of publications, the hosting of seminars and the provision of other capacity building measures. The publication by Pobal of A Framework to Support Social Inclusion for Lesbian, Gay & Bisexual People and More Than a Phase put down a clear marker which we intend to build upon.

Pobal is happy to be associated with the issuing of this Code of Practice, which will be circulated for implementation in Integrated Companies and recommended to organisations and projects that are funded through Pobal. We are especially happy to be involved in collaboratively working with the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, the Family Support Agency and GLEN to bring about a coherent application of equality measures at local level. We sincerely hope that this initiative will provide a foundation for further work in this area into the future.

VERO MODA



INTRODUCTION

The last twenty years have seen great progress for lesbian, gay and bisexual people, and there is a developing awareness of transgender issues. Social progress has been led by more and more LGBT people living their lives openly and finding support and acceptance from families, friends and work colleagues. LGBT people and our supporters have worked actively for progress in law such as the decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1993 and the Equal Status and Employment Equality Acts in the 1990s. The advent of Civil Partnership for same-sex couples as proposed in the Civil Partnership Bill 2009 will bring new visibility for LGB people. The enactment of inclusive gender recognition legislation is a key priority for trans people.

The Equality Authority report *Implementing Equality for Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals* in 2002 examined a wide range of themes relevant to lesbian, gay and bisexual people including Community Development and Empowerment. The report stated “many LGB people remain very isolated, without access to or knowledge of LGB community organisations, supports or social outlets for meeting other gay people. This has consequences, both in terms of the impact on the individual’s health, social wellbeing and personal development, and in terms of lost contributions to the broader community”.

The report notes the successful work of the Community Development Programme in supporting disadvantaged communities and identifies the programme’s potential to “facilitate the participation of LGB communities, as with other communities of interest, in decision-making structures at local, regional and national levels. Capacity building is essential, and this involves the provision of resources, ongoing development and training supports to local LGB communities, and linkages to the wider supports available” (Ibid.). This potential is shared by Family Resource Centres. The Local Development Social Inclusion Programme identifies lesbian, gay and bisexual people as a group experiencing inequality and discrimination, and recognises that where this combines with other factors it can result in multiple disadvantage and social exclusion.

This Code of Practice will provide CDPs, FRCs and Urban Partnerships/Integrated Local Development Companies with a structure within which they can frame their support for LGBT people. Adoption of this Code of Practice will influence the internal workings of a CDP/FRC/Urban Partnership/Integrated Local Development Company as well as how the CDP/FRC/Urban Partnership/Integrated Local Development Company acts within its local community

LGBT EXPERIENCES OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION

International estimates are that 6 -10% of people are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT). As such ¼ - ½ million people in Ireland are LGBT.

A major study of over 1100 lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in Ireland *Supporting LGBT Lives: A Study of the Mental Health and Wellbeing of LGBT People (GLEN/BeLonG To 2009)* found that the most common age that LGBT people realise their sexual orientation or gender identity is 12 years of age and the most common age that they first disclose their identity to others (“come out”) is 17 years of age. LGBT people still face considerable levels of stigmatisation, discrimination and harassment in their daily lives. The majority of LGBT people learn to cope with this, particularly when they have the support of family and friends, and participate with LGBT organisations and social networks. However, a significant number of LGBT people in the study, most particularly younger LGBT people, had to cope with stigmatization, discrimination and harassment without support. Many also faced additional stress from experiences such as very high levels of homophobic bullying in schools and physical and verbal attacks. This had a negative impact on their mental health, leading to significant levels of psychological distress, self-harm and suicidality.

sOUTH, LGBT Community Group Waterford and South East. *Photo: Rainer Tenhunen*



Some of the key findings include:

- 80% of online respondents reported they had been verbally abused because of their LGBT identity
- 40% were threatened with physical violence
- 25% had been punched, kicked or beaten

In schools

- Over half of respondents had been called abusive names due to their sexual orientation or gender identity by fellow students
- 40% had been verbally threatened by fellow students
- A quarter of the overall sample had been physically threatened by their peers
- 20% missed or skipped school because they felt threatened or were afraid of getting hurt at school

Resilience, or the ability to cope with the above issues, came primarily from developing strong social sources of support and developing a positive LGBT identity. The support of friends and family, and positive experiences in communities, schools or workplaces are critical in developing this resilience. Clearly CDPs, FRCs, Urban Partnerships/Integrated Local Development Companies can play a critical role in facilitating the provision of these supports. The study found that the vast majority (81%) of LGBT people are now comfortable with their identity, with over two thirds of respondents disclosing their identity (coming out) to all their immediate families.

However, for the most vulnerable, the research showed high levels of psychological distress arising from stigmatisation and harassment, leading to significant levels of self-harm and suicidality. LGBT teenagers can be particularly isolated, given that many will be exploring their sexual orientation or gender identity without any support. At this time of negotiating their journey to adulthood, a critical period of social and emotional development, they can be particularly vulnerable.

A picture emerged from *LGBT Lives* of the most vulnerable participants:

- 27% of those surveyed had self harmed at least once, the vast majority on more than one occasion
- This figure rose to 40% for female respondents
- 16 years of age was the average age of onset of self-harm
- Over 50% of those who self-harmed did not seek any form of help
- 18% of the online sample had attempted suicide, of whom almost half saw this as related to their LGBT identity
- 17 and a half years of age was the average age of first suicide attempt
- 25% of female respondents and 15% of males had attempted suicide at least once

The findings on self harm and suicide were strongly linked to: being physically or verbally threatened, or physically hurt; feeling alone and socially isolated, particularly in school, and a fear of or actually experiencing rejection by friends and family. It is vitally important that action is taken to support and protect LGBT young people in our schools and communities.

Improving the visibility and status of LGBT people in Irish society must underpin all efforts to address the psychological distress and suicidality uncovered in the research and to support the mental health and well being of LGBT people. This extends across all areas of Irish life, including health and social policies and services, families and friends, schools and workplaces and the wider community. CDPs, FRCs, Urban Partnerships/Integrated Local Development Companies can play an invaluable role in this regard.

Discrimination and prejudice also increase risks of drug use and homelessness for young LGBT people.

- Approx. twice as likely to have tried drugs than young people in general,
- between 1.8 and 5.8 times more likely to have used drugs in the last month
- Almost one-third of respondents were effectively homeless at some stage of their lives.

Drug use amongst Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender young adults in Ireland (Belong To, 2006).

Many lesbians and gay men are parents from previous heterosexual relationships. Now more and more same-sex couples and in particular lesbians are becoming parents in Ireland. Irish law makes little provision for same sex couples. Same sex couples and individuals are generally excluded from assisted reproduction services. There is no legal mechanism currently to recognise the rights and responsibilities of non-biological same-sex parents. The most worrying aspect of this discrimination is that children in same sex parented households are disadvantaged by the State *vis á vis* children parented by married people.

It is often more difficult for LGBT people to be out in rural areas. Cities are more conducive to allowing LGBT people select which areas of their life they wish to be out in and to whom they are out to e.g. work, with friends, to family, neighbours, with medical services and associative activities. This is more difficult in rural areas where being out in one domain e.g. at work means it is more likely that one's community, one's family and one's friends are aware that one is LGBT. As a result of this and other factors LGBT people will be less likely to be out and hence be more disconnected and invisible. Rural LGBT people may be more likely to leave the place of their birth/youth than the general population.

A Needs Analysis of the LGBT Population in Galway, Mayo and Roscommon (GLEN and LGBT West 2008) found that over one in eight respondents reported always feeling isolated and over 7 in 10 reported sometimes feeling isolated because of social reactions to their sexual orientation or gender identity. Respondents to the survey highlighted the very limited number of local outlets for people to socialise that are LGBT friendly. Many participants highlighted how they happened across other LGBT people and felt that they were lucky to have accessed a network of LGBT friends. They expressed concern that if they had not made particular contacts they may have remained isolated from an LGBT network. Many described a sort of 'ripple' effect in terms of meeting people, whereby they might get to know one or two people who then introduced them to others and so on. However, some participants described how making that first contact was very difficult both in terms of identifying people and in terms of having the confidence to take the first step. This is highlighted by the fact that half of the survey respondents stated that they would use a coming out support group if it was available to them.

Community Development Projects and Family Resource Centres who comprise the Network of CDPs and FRCs Supporting Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People have found it challenging to identify and work with LGBT people using the same methodologies employed when working with other groups experiencing discrimination and social exclusion. This can largely be attributed to the atmosphere of harassment and discrimination directed at the LGBT community that leaves many LGBT people reluctant to “come out” and organise around LGBT specific issues.

This Code of Practice on the following pages provides CDPs, FRCs and Urban Partnerships/Integrated Local Development Companies with a structure within which they can frame their support for LGBT people. Adoption of this Code of Practice will influence the internal workings of a CDP/FRC/Urban Partnership/Integrated Local Development Company as well as how the CDP/FRC/Urban Partnership/Integrated Local Development Company acts within its local community.

Dublin Pride. Photo: Christopher Robson



SUPPORTING LGBT COMMUNITIES CODE OF PRACTICE

(Insert name of Organisation)

is committed to this Code of Practice because:

As a CDP / FRC / Urban Partnership/Integrated Company we are committed to addressing social injustices and working towards equality for all using community development principles.

It is essential that all forms of discrimination and exclusion are regarded as unacceptable and are challenged by our CDP / FRC / Urban Partnership/Integrated Company.

The practice of inclusion should be relevant to all of the CDP/FRC/ Urban Partnership/Integrated Company's work.

Implementation of this Code of Practice will contribute to the fulfilment of the legal obligations faced by our CDP / FRC/Urban Partnership/Integrated Company as a service provider.

INTERNAL ACTIONS

One member of the CDP/FRC/Urban Partnership/Integrated Company's Voluntary Management Committee/Board will be given special responsibility for the implementation of this Code of Practice.

The CDP/FRC/Urban Partnership/Integrated Company will recognise and address the discrimination and exclusion of LGBT people. This will be an integral part of the CDP/FRC/Urban Partnership/Integrated Company's work and will be noted in the CDP/FRC/Urban Partnership/Integrated Company's Work Plan.

All CDP/FRC/Urban Partnership/Integrated Company staff and volunteers will be encouraged to undertake awareness raising training on this issue.

The CDP/FRC/Urban Partnership/Integrated Company will recognise that not all LGBT people have 'come out' and will handle all queries, information requests, etc., in complete confidence.

CDP/FRC/Urban Partnership/Integrated Company staff and volunteers will ensure that the resource centre is visibly LGBT friendly (through the display of posters, information, etc.).

Homophobic and transphobic language will not be tolerated within the CDP/FRC/Urban Partnership/Integrated Company.

The CDP/FRC/Urban Partnership/Integrated Company will promote an LGBT friendly environment to other groups using the centre.

Support LGBT people locally to organise and work together collectively.

The CDP/FRC/Urban Partnership/Integrated Company will maintain up-to-date information on where LGBT people can access specialised support (e.g. LGBT Helplines, etc.)

Relevant publications will be available or on display in the CDP/FRC/Urban Partnership/Integrated Company's resource centre.

The CDP/FRC/Urban Partnership/Integrated Company will put in place measures to proof their activities to ensure that they are LGBT friendly.

The CDP/FRC/Urban Partnership/Integrated Company will endeavour to develop and foster a LGBT friendly ethos. This will be reflected in the recruitment of staff and volunteers.

EXTERNAL ACTIONS

The CDP / FRC / Urban Partnership/Integrated Company will:

Work to build and maintain a strong working relationship with regional and national organisations that have expertise in providing services for the LGBT communities.

Contribute to other initiatives that are providing supports to LGBT people in our community and Region.

Meet regularly with other CDPs, FRCs and the Urban Partnership/Integrated Company to further our understanding of the issues affecting LGBT people and to work together to develop common responses to these issues that can be implemented at local community level.

Raise the issues and concerns of the LGBT communities at other fora of which we are a part, for example Community Development Programme / Family and Community Services Resource Centre Programme structures, County / City Development Board structures, etc.

To actively support and participate in national awareness raising events such as LGBT Pride Week.

IMPLEMENTING THE CODE

This Code of Practice will be discussed at the Voluntary Management Committee/Board and amended as necessary before being ratified.

Once ratified, implementation of the Code of Practice will be undertaken by management and staff within the CDP/FRC/Urban Partnership/Integrated Company.

The CDP/FRC/Urban Partnership/Integrated Company will take full responsibility for providing the most comprehensive and up-to-date information on services and supports that are in place and available to LGBT people within the catchment area of the CDP/FRC/Urban Partnership/Integrated Company.

DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

A **Lesbian** is a woman who is romantically, sexually and/or emotionally attracted to women. (Many lesbians prefer to be called lesbian rather than gay, queer or homosexual because it reflects their separate experience).

A **Gay** person is a man or woman who is romantically, sexually and/or emotionally attracted to people of the same sex. (Many gay men prefer to be called 'gay' rather than homosexual. Many women who are gay prefer to be identified as 'lesbian').

A **Bisexual** is a man or woman who is romantically, sexually and/or emotionally attracted to people of both sexes.

Transgender: an inclusive, umbrella term referring to people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex assigned to them at birth.

Trans: an inclusive term for all transgender, transsexual, and gender-variant or differently gendered people, who identify as, or are perceived to be, transgressing stereotypical gender norms.

Definitions from *More Than a Phase: A resource guide for the inclusion of young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender learners* (Pobal, 2006) and *Transphobia in Ireland* (TENI, 2009)

CDP Community Development Project

FRC Family Resource Centre

GLEN Gay and Lesbian Equality Network

Urban Partnerships/Integrated Companies

FURTHER GUIDANCE INFORMATION & SUPPORT

For further information on any of the above or for details about local LGBT groups contact:

GLEN - Gay and Lesbian Equality Network

GLEN are a national LGBT policy organisation working on community development, education, mental and general health, legislation and policy change for LGB people.

www.glen.ie, Tel: 01 4730563, info@glen.ie

BeLonG To Youth Service

A national youth service for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender young people aged between 14 and 23. BeLonG To's work also includes training and advocacy.

www.belongto.org, 01 670 6223, info@belongto.org

TENI - Transgender Equality Network Ireland

TENI is dedicated to promoting positive awareness about gender diversity and to improving conditions and advancing equality for all Transsexual and Transgender people in Ireland

www.teni.ie, info@teni.ie, 085 147 7166

