



Making LGBT+ older people feel comfortable in your groups: a toolkit for people organising social groups and activities for all older people

**A Time to Shine toolkit
February 2022**

Time to Shine has been asked by a number of people who organise groups and activities how they can best act as allies and make their groups open and welcoming to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, Queer, Intersex (LGBTQI+) older people.. Sage staff have pulled together some top tips to help you get your groups started on the journey to being LGBTQI+ welcoming.



Introduction

The Time to Shine programme has worked with the [Sage](#) project which has engaged older LGBT+ people over the past six years. There has been lots of learning within the project, but also a recognition that Sage is only ever going to reach a small number of people directly. One of the clearest learning points is the need to ensure LGBT+ older people can feel confident about joining local groups by changing the way those groups include people. This holds especially true as people age further and lose the ability or desire to travel distances to meetings and activities.

Sage is also currently able to offer awareness raising training for staff and volunteers, contact leeds@mesmac.co.uk to find out more. There are other LGBT+ organisations able to offer online staff training too, you'll find some of them listed in the References section at the end of this Toolkit.

Some notes for you all on supporting LGBT+ Groups and Individuals

1. It starts by acknowledging that we, the LGBTQI+ community, exist (always have and always will) and some of us are likely already to be members of your group.
2. Given that, embrace us (not literally unless we are happy with that..!) by using the correct pronouns, understanding the various letters in the LGBTQI + acronym and by treating us as you would any other member.
3. Recognise that by identifying as a member of the LGBTQI+ community we have something in common, that might be the only thing we share. Members are very diverse in interests, age, experiences, education, grumpiness etc. In other words, we are normal people.
4. If you are not sure what pronouns to use, ask. We don't bite.
5. Don't assume that all people are heterosexual. You will hear more strident people describe this as heteronormative, which annoys many LGBTQI+ people. Common examples are being asked if your husband is picking you up from a hospital appointment, in a card shop if you are buying a card for your partner and the shop assistant assumes they are the opposite sex...it can get a bit wearing for us over time.
6. This leads us onto how many times a day we have to navigate the decision to out our selves because we do not know what peoples' reactions will be.
7. This also applies to you too as friends and allies. Please do not 'out' us unless you know this is ok, for the same reason as 6. We do not know how people will react.
8. It might seem that same-sex kissing on TV, two Gay dads or two mothers are everywhere nowadays but this is new, very new. I cover some of the dates of significant changes to laws and rights in the training I do. Many are shocked as to how recently these changes have taken place.

9. If you do have members of the LGBTQI+ in your groups, or if you don't, part of the normalisation process is to celebrate key moments in the LGBTQI+ calendar anyway. It can be as passive as putting up posters reminding people that February is LGBT History month, organising a trip to watch the Leeds Pride parade. Or more active by organising an event for everyone on a particular day, asking someone to come in and talk about their lives, a poetry event in which LGBTQI+ poems are included. These can be poems or songs written on a theme but also by famous and not yet famous members of the LGBTQI+ community, with a discussion on the massive contributions made from LGBTQI+ people in these areas.
10. For those willing to acknowledge their gender identity and their sexuality, putting them in positions of responsibility will show that being a member of the LGBTQI+ plus community can lead to success in any field.
11. This is the case for age or youth too. We can be and are a success in every field.
12. Working with allies and expanding personal and professional networks to support the LGBTQI+ community is a great way to support us.
13. Supporting any legal or social changes that need wider support is a fantastic way to support positive change. Without the support of our European allies I am doubtful that Civil Partnership and same sex marriage would be law nowadays.
14. Finally keeping an eye on changes that might be detrimental to the LGBTQI+ community or might roll back gains already won; speaking out about individual homophobic, transphobic, or other hurtful comments can make all the difference. It is good to know that some people have our backs.
15. Let me thank you personally and your organisation for all that you have done, are doing and will do in the future. It means a lot.

In summary

So go and make a start by running your group as though it already has LGBT+ members (it probably has), find out what's happening around you and put up the posters, just like you do for Knit & Natter or yoga classes.

You'll find some other reading, links to LGBT+ organisations and training below. I have included the ones I know of who are working with older people, but it's not an exhaustive list. Look in your own area and build local alliances too.



Resources and useful links

[Sage: a project for older LGBT+ people in Leeds report](#)

[Reducing Social isolation amongst older LGBT+ people: a case study of the Sage project](#)

[Reducing social isolation in LGBT+ communities aged over 50 – learning from Ageing Better](#)

[Opening Doors London](#)

Centre for Ageing Better [LGBT+ History Month blog](#) and others


[FREE TO BE ME IN CARE | York LGBT Forum](#)
[Training for professionals | Opening Doors](#)

[LGBTQ+ glossary | Opening Doors](#)
[LGBTQI Glossary](#)
[The Genderbread Person](#)

to contact Sage www.mesmac.co.uk/our-services/leeds/sage



Leeds Older People's Forum Joseph's Well, Suite C24 Leeds LS3 1AB

 0113 2441697

 hello@opforum.org.uk

 www.opforum.org.uk

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