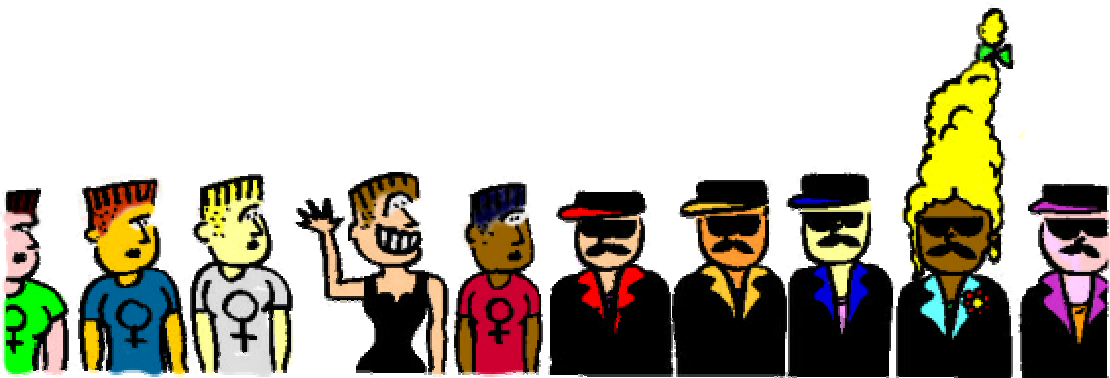


Breaking Down Barriers

Building a more diverse queer community



A report from the QueerSpace diversity conference held as a part of Belfast Pride 2002 on 31 July in Clanmil Housing, Waring Street.

QueerSpace is a volunteer-led organisation based on collective planning and action which serves the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans (LGBT) Community of Belfast and Northern Ireland by raising its visibility, supporting its activities, providing it with resources and facilitating communication while adhering to the principles of community orientation, freedom of identity, ethical funding and accessibility.

In April 2002, QueerSpace received a grant from the Department for Social Development through the Active Community Initiative to develop an event to investigate diversity through the involvement of groups outside the LGBT community. This event took the form of Breaking Down Barriers, a discussion whose aims were to identify barriers which prevent some LGBT people from fully participating in LGBT society and to develop strategies for overcoming these barriers. This is a report of that discussion, held during Belfast Pride 2002 on the 31st of August at Clanmil Housing.

QueerSpace thanks everyone who helped us to make Breaking Down Barriers happen. This includes Patricia Bray, Terry Sargent, Karima Zahi, Sinead Tierney, Marion Hegarty, Robert May, Sean McDaid, Peter Hamill, Patrick Saunders, Janet Beck, Shane Gilcrist and Jim Pow, organisations such as Belfast Pride, Clanmil Housing, Disability Action, Gay & Lesbian Youth Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities, the Royal National Institute for Deaf People, the Volunteer Development Agency, Volunteer Services Belfast and, for its financial support, the Department for Social Development.

CONTENTS

Introduction:

Welcome from QueerSpace

Speakers:

Karima Zahi

Training and Education Officer
Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities

Patricia Bray

Statutory Duty and Policy Officer
Disability Action

Terry Sergeant

Youth Worker
Gay & Lesbian Youth Northern Ireland

Open Discussion

Appendices

Conclusions and Recommendations

About QueerSpace

LGBT Organisations of Northern Ireland

Original Artwork by Patrick Saunders.

Mairéad
QueerSpace

On behalf of QueerSpace I would like to thank everybody for being here tonight. It's good to see such a good turnout. We're here tonight exploring the theme of diversity and also the barriers to participation faced by members of our own community.

I have to firstly thank the Department for Social Development for funding this event through the Active Community Initiative programme. I would also like to thank the speakers we have here tonight. I'll introduce them shortly. Each will give a short talk on their different constituencies and reasons why members of their constituencies don't participate as much as they should.

Thanks also to the audience, as well. There will be time also after people have spoken for questions and comments from the floor.

This is being taped in the hope that after this the contributions and ideas people have come up with will be written up, typed up and presented in a report. For a copy, please contact QueerSpace: there are contact details for QueerSpace in the back on the wee table.

I'm just going to say a few words about QueerSpace. Because I think it's great. QueerSpace was set up in January and February of 1998. It's an alcohol and drug free zone for members of the LGBT community. It was set up as a social and support resource for all of us. It's run by and for members of the LGBT community. At the moment it holds its Collective Meeting on Wednesday nights in Cathedral Buildings on Donegall Street. It also has a Saturday drop-in called InSpace. It also holds many varied events, and when I say 'varied', just look at the monthly events calendar and you'll know what I'm talking about.

We're also involved in advancing issues faced by members of the LGBT community. QueerSpace is one of the few organisations whose remit extends to include lesbians, gay men, bisexual people and trans people. And it one of the few organisations, if not the only one, which has done that successfully. It has

always been supportive of other gay organisations, and is one of the Foundation Members of CoSO.

We're here tonight to try and look at reasons why participation in LGBT society is not as full as it should be.



Karima Zahi

Training and Education Officer
Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic
Minorities

NICEM is an umbrella membership based organisation for ethnic minority communities in the North and we're based in Shaftesbury Square in Belfast. You are very welcome to visit our website; it's www.nicem.org.uk.

I'd like to start by thanking QueerSpace for inviting NICEM to address issues facing ethnic minorities in the LGBT community. The very fact that QueerSpace is addressing these issues shows that we are on the right track. What I would like to concentrate on in the next five minutes and a bit are looking firstly at a few of the barriers and secondly at ways of overcoming those particular barriers.

As I was looking through the ILGA (International Lesbian and Gay Alliance) report to the Council of Europe on discrimination of LGBT people, and

other various reports dealing with LGBT issues, what became apparent was the lack of focus of research on minority ethnic communities within the LGBT community. I think that is indicative of a lack of understanding of what the real issues are. We are all well aware of the similarities and parallels between homophobia and racism. We've seen that in the London pub bombings of 1999, where LGBT and black communities were particularly targeted.

To come back to Northern Ireland, if we're going to be looking at some of the barriers, we will have to look at barriers which also exist within the wider society in relation to ethnic minorities. The ethnic minority community is quite small: it has been estimated at twenty-six thousand, roughly one and a half percent of the population, which is well below the averages in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland. The main communities are the Chinese, the

Traveller and the Indian and Pakistani communities, with smaller communities of Filipinos, Portuguese and people from the Middle East. We will have a clearer understanding of what the true numbers are after publication of the results of the last census.

In the LASI (Lesbian Advocacy Support Initiative) report, *A Mighty Silence*, there is a section which deals with minority ethnic women who are lesbians. I'd like to quote what one particular woman said in relation to her situation.

"I'm not as assertive in the Lesbian community as in the Straight community. It's not verbal discrimination; it's ignorance of identity and the need to include. They don't advocate discussion around black women's rights. There is nothing around pride. People are afraid to talk to you. I would try to advocate lesbian feminist rights, but there is not linking of equality of rights. I have been disappointed about

the lack of advocacy of rights. There is tokenism. We're just a microcosm of the human race and we try to forget that. If we cause problems, it's seen as weakness. That's part of racisms, sexism and homophobia."

I think it's important to hear the voices of people from the community who are largely not represented or heard whether it is within the LGBT community or within the ethnic minority communities.

Just as an indication of the situation in Northern Ireland, Professor Paul Conliff from the University of Ulster, Jordanstown, did research for the Office of Statistics entitled *Racial Attitudes and Prejudice in Northern Ireland*. In his research, and that of Michael Keenan, there were a number of elements which were highlighted on the issues of how ethnic minorities are perceived by society at large in Northern Ireland. The main element was that people were twice as likely to express racial

prejudice than sectarian prejudice. So perhaps this is also something that may be present among the LGBT community. The rest of the research focused on areas of social and professional life, such as harassment in the work place or in housing. For Travellers, in particular, fifty-seven percent of people would not accept Travellers as residents. In relation to marriage, there were also problems. But I won't dwell on this here. You are welcome to have a look at the findings of this research.

This is perhaps an indication of how racial prejudice or the perception of racial prejudice might be something that prohibits involvement at one level. Looking at the Executive Board of ILGA and other organisations in Europe and Northern Ireland, the striking fact is that most members are white. To what extent can black people, for example, feel included? It is something that needs to be addressed. There are obviously marginalized

groups among ethnic minority communities such as the Travellers, who are marginalized by the mainstream society. Also newcomers such as asylum seekers and refugees, who a lot of the time are coming from countries where same-sex relations are still considered a crime. They could actually be leaving their country of origin on the basis of oppression for their sexual orientation.

And of course the attitudes among ethnic minority community with regards to sexual orientation which is largely overlooked; there could certainly be perceptions by some members of ethnic minority communities that would make it difficult to address the issue of sexual orientation within their respective communities. Again, to reflect what one of the women who was interviewed as part of the LASI report mentioned, there was a large reliance of members of ethnic minority lesbians on lesbian groups to advocate for their rights. And

that, in itself, it is hoped will lead to greater visibility within ethnic minority communities. It is important to comment on the power differentials between the white settled community and ethnic minorities who live in the North.

It is important to look at policies and practices in place that are intended to ensure inclusiveness within the different LGBT organisations and to what extent there is representative participation of the diversity of those groups within the community. This is why some of the principals under the Section 75 Statutory Duty will benefit all communities concerned, that is ethnic minorities as well as LGBT people. In terms of applying the consultation principle, there is a resourcing implication there, but it is important at the same time to ensure that people are asked what are the issues preventing participation by their particular group. Obviously, I can only speak from my personal

experience and cannot reflect the views of all ethnic minorities in Northern Ireland.

Just in terms of developing strategies to overcome the barriers, there are certain guidelines which you can take note of in relation to working with certain ethnic minority communities. The first step is to acknowledge that there are racial prejudices. There is no point in denying this could be an element particularly in a community such as Northern Ireland which has not yet fully addressed the issue of racial equality. This is a relatively new focus.

It is important to take into account the idea of multiple identity. Minority ethnic LGBT people are faced with discrimination on a number of different levels because of their multiple identity.

When moving forward with those particular groups it is important to consider how to develop anti-oppressive practice. For example, how do

we define 'good practice'? How do we make policy and practice explicit? Have we examined the culture of the organisation? How do we create a new environment where people can identify with that environment but also feel part of it?

It is important to challenge discrimination within organisations. In relation to strategies for good practice, it is important to take into account the legal framework, for example, the Race Relations Order, and to have a declaration advised by it. To think of a code of practice, how racial equality training could be important in raising awareness among people who work within the various LGBT organisations on issues affecting ethnic minorities and generally how to move towards implementing racial equality.

I'll finish by mentioning the developments at the European level with the introduction of the Framework Directive as well as the Race Directive.

Next year will be quite crucial for that. In addition to the developments with respect to Section 75, this could be instrumental in ensuring that in the near future there will be greater focus on meeting the needs of minority ethnic people within the LGBT community as well as looking at the contributions of people within those communities. Obviously it is important to focus on the two aspects.

Just in relation to the introduction of legislation at the domestic level, NICEM is lucky to have secured the support of the European Commission to fund a project which involves specifically looking at the very important issue of multiple identity and multiple discrimination as part of the community action project to combat discrimination. So we will be setting up a training programme, a pilot programme, which will involve communities representing gender, age, sexual orientation, race or ethnicity, religion and disability. That

will enable greater communication between the different communities so that the issue of multiple identity becomes one that is dealt with across the board by all those communities. We have all been guilty of focusing on a single issue rather than looking at multiple identities. This will

encourage a lot of cooperation in the future.

But look now at Boston Pride, where the theme this year is racism. Perhaps this is something that could be looked at in the future as a way of attracting the attention of ethnic minority people in the LGBT community.



Particia Bray

Statutory Duty and Policy Officer
Disability Action

Disability Action works to ensure that people with disabilities obtain their full rights as citizens by supporting inclusion, influencing government policy and changing attitudes in partnership with disabled people. It's an umbrella organisation with over one hundred eighty member groups covering every aspect of disability: physical, mental, sensory, hidden. We have offices in Newry, Dungannon, Carrickfergus and Derry, where I work, and with headquarters in Belfast.

As Statutory Duty Officer, my remit is to act as a link person with public authorities with regard to implementing their statutory duty. But I also work with Disability Action's member groups and disabled people across Northern Ireland to develop skills so that they can engage effectively in the decision making process and thereby give disabled people their rights.

In Disability Action's view, Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act provides the instrument to implement strategic change. The Statutory Duty requires public authorities when carrying out their functions to have due regard for the need to promote equality of opportunity. For the first time, decision makers are obliged to consider disability not as a health issue, which has been our legacy to date, but as an issue concerning the human rights of those with disabilities. It represents an opportunity for people with disabilities to influence, develop and implement policies that affect their lives. Mainstreaming equality, as part of the process of developing new legislation and policies, should ensure that both positive and negative impacts are considered so that disabled people will benefit.

I'm delighted to be here this evening along with other representatives. I particularly believe that disability and the

LGBT categories share a common experience in that it is within their own communities that they can feel most marginalized. I'm sure you'll recognise that. People with disabilities are rarely seen as MLA's, local councillors, school governors or any other key community decision maker. In other words, we have no role models. Society has conditioned disabled people to have low expectations through controls, poor services and institutions. Whilst they may have made tentative advances by campaigns by disability groups, we as disabled people are hampered by no gut-sense or history of rights because that concept is not enshrined in society's view of disabled people, unlike other movements like the trade union movement or the women's movement.

Even though we have strong anti-discrimination legislation—and here in Northern Ireland we have the most advanced with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act, which

now recognises age and LGBT status for the first time—we still have institutionalised inequalities. The McPherson Report accused the Metropolitan Police of institutionalised racism even though they had an excellent equal opportunities document. But it was not a live document, as such. And that's a warning to everyone.

What we need to focus on this evening are the barriers faced by disabled people so that we can gain an understanding of how they can be overcome. It's estimated that there are approximately two hundred and one thousand disabled adults in Northern Ireland and this figure represents seventeen and a half percent of the adult population. The equivalent in Great Britain is fourteen percent. We have a higher population and I consider this a large minority. Yet people with disabilities are discriminated against daily in all walks of life. I'm sure that you will recognise some of the

barriers that disabled people have to face.

For example, look at the building environment. Can you imagine the hue and cry if a Catholic or a Protestant could not enter a building in Northern Ireland? Yet the majority of shops, pubs and public buildings are not fully accessible, although this should change in 2004 when the Physical Access part of the Disability Discrimination Act is introduced.

Look at education. Disabled children within the education system are separated from their non-disabled peers. This leads to a build-up of prejudices and stereotypes. If disabled and non-disabled children were educated together, then the future doctors, architects and educators would have a better understanding of disability as a human rights issue, rather than as a health and safety issue.

Look at transport. There is no accessible transport. If a disabled person who is a wheel chair user wants to travel by train, then they travel in the luggage compartment. The indignities of air travel are well documented.

Look at housing and accommodation. People with disabilities don't have a choice of where they wish to live. Accessible accommodation is usually in segregated locations where everybody has a disability. Or they have to remain at home or in residential care. Therefore, disabled people cannot lead independent lives.

Training and employment. Northern Ireland Disability Council research showed that only one in six disabled people are in paid employment, and where they are in employment, it is in low paid, low skill jobs without any chances of career advancement.

Access to services, such as leisure, arts or culture, are

denied as well. Many leisure centres for example, for sporting activities are completely inaccessible.

Access to information. An inability to access necessary information directly impacts on disabled people's opportunity to participate and integrate into society. The media portray disabled people as victims, treating their lives as tragic, using disempowering language and writing about disabled people from the point of view of non-disabled people, thereby undermining disabled people's position in society.

Last but not least, personal relationships. Northern Ireland, as you are aware, is a polarised society. Within this society, we do not often see disabled people out and about socialising for two main reasons. One, during The Troubles, disabled people were seen as a health and safety issue for evacuation purposes, and therefore, this instituted an unwelcoming culture. Disabled people were refused

at doors of pubs and nightclubs. And, two, as I've already alluded to no physical access in places of entertainment.

Some non-disabled people believe the disabled people are asexual, if they think in those terms at all, because that is nice and safe and, after all, the disabled person did not choose to be that way and so there's pity and sympathy. When they do have concern of a disabled person's sexuality, then drastic action has been taken. We know of court cases to decide if a young person with a learning disability should be sterilised. So there's interference from the powers that be.

Can you imagine how that cage would be rattled if a young person with a disability was to declare themselves as gay or lesbian as well? A young person with a disability who is gay or lesbian may be totally dependent upon parents or siblings to take them to the pub on a Friday or Saturday

night. You must understand how difficult it must be for that young person to come out without first establishing the safety net of recognising and dealing with their sexuality, in the company of their peers, and then to develop personal relationships without their family's knowledge.

It is only through a disabled person leaving the home environment, which is not always possible for the reasons I have outlined, and leading an independent life that they will have the freedom to make their personal relationship choices in an ideal world.

And there is another huge barrier. The sexuality of gay, lesbian and disabled people are open to debate and critique. These two constituencies are the only two equality categories open to public scrutiny when it comes to their sexuality.

So what can we do to overcome discrimination? You can help by sending out

messages of welcoming within your organisations. For example, do you have a text phone, events held in accessible venues, publicity material written in inclusive language.

And do you have stereotypes yourself? You need to challenge yourselves how you really feel about people with disabilities. Do you always imagine that it's a person in a wheelchair? Yet only four percent of the disabled population uses wheelchairs.

In conclusion, I'd like to say that traditionally, disabled and lesbian and gay people have been expected to work hard to overcome their difference, striving to fit in with the accepted systems and structures of our society and working as hard as they can to become like non-disabled or heterosexual people—which is, of course, the very thing that they cannot become. What we need to do is apply social norms and values. This

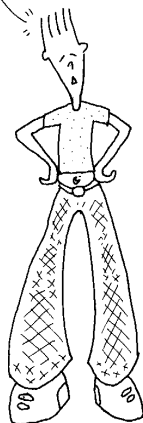
concept of rights must be taught in the schools.

I totally agree with the Rainbow Project, whom I heard on the radio recently received quite a large amount of funding from the Princess Diana Fund, who said that only education will change come about. We need education in our schools as part of the Act of Citizen Curriculum. Disabled and non-disabled children being educated together will help to break down barriers for future generations. And as for us, who are not in the

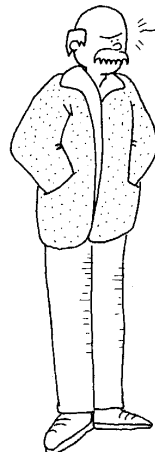
education system anymore, we need to continue to work together to learn from each other and to share our common experiences. This is an example of what can actually happen.

In a project called Diversity Matters, NICEM, CoSO and Disability Action, along with others, are partners in an equal project where the theme to challenge discrimination by working with the community, voluntary, private and public sectors to help them promote equality.

I hate the gay scene!
It's full of creepy old men
leering at you and trying
to get into your knickers



I hate the gay scene!
It's full of teenage twinks
in shiny crop-tops looking
down their noses at anyone
over the age of 25



Terry Sergeant

Youth Worker

Gay & Lesbian Youth Northern
Ireland

GLYNI is essentially a youth group for young people aged sixteen to twenty-five years who are perhaps just coming to terms with their sexuality or who are not yet out on the scene. It was set up as a support group and as a safe environment for young people to explore their sexuality away from places like the gay bars and gay clubs here in Belfast. The group has been up and running for about two and a half years now and it is a very popular group, growing all the time.

I'd just like to say how pleased I am to be able to come here tonight to take part in what we consider to be a very important event and to raise awareness and address some of the issues that very often do affect people who try to get involved in the LGBT community here in Northern Ireland.

Funnily enough, being from a gay, lesbian and bisexual youth organisation I'm going to talk to you specifically about issues that do affect young people who would like to get involved. Before I came here, I spoke with members of the youth group to get their experiences of getting involved with the LGBT community. So I have here a list of a few points, and I'm glad it is just a few points because if there were pages and pages, then we really would have a problem in the LGBT community. I do however think that these points are very relevant and very significant to young people.

The first one is probably something that is very obvious: young people who are under the age of eighteen cannot go to places like the gay bars and gay clubs. The problem with this is—and young people do recognise that the law is the law, and that the laws have been made for a specific purpose, and they don't feel that just because they are gay,

lesbian or bisexual that their sexuality should give them a sort of special status over their heterosexual counterparts—the problem is, if you are gay, lesbian or bisexual or indeed transgendered, very often your social life revolves around 'The Scene'. And The Scene very often revolves around the gay bars. You tend to find that the major events within the LGBT community are held in the gay clubs. This excludes young people under the age of eighteen, so that they can't get involved in those sorts of things. It's very disheartening for members of our youth group who have friends who are over eighteen, and those people are going out at the weekends, and having great fun, but the ones under the age of eighteen aren't able to go out and join them.

Now these young people complaining to us about this are not suggesting that the gay bars or clubs here reduce the age at which they let people in. Of course that's a ridiculous idea. What they

suggest is bringing about a situation whereby there is less emphasis on the gay clubs and to make more social venues available where young LGBT people can socialise in an alcohol free environment. This suggestion comes at the top of the list all of the time whenever we ask young people about getting involved in the community.

The second point I would like to make follows on from the first one. That is, young people grow up and seem to believe that if they are gay, lesbian, bisexual, then everything really does revolve around the gay bars and clubs. They don't realise there are plenty of organisations here in Belfast like QueerSpace, like the Sunday Scene at Lesbian Line, like the Rainbow Project, and the many other groups which seem to be popping up at the moment.

We do a lot of work in GLYNI telling young people about these other places where they can go and meet different

people from different backgrounds. But it's very surprising when we actually go out to places like the gay clubs and bars and ask young people if they know that such and such place exists to hear them say they've never heard of that. So there does seem to be this problem with young people who do go out onto The Scene that they actually don't know about the other organisations and don't know what the other organisations have to offer. It's no surprise that when it comes to getting involved in the "gay community" the people don't get involved because they really just don't know what's out there.

Another issue that often comes up is with regards to young women, young lesbian and bisexual women. I hear it week after week at the youth group: 'I'm not going to that because it's all men.' 'I'm not getting involved in that because it's just for gay men.' This is very common with young lesbian and bisexual

women: they do see the gay community as being geared toward the male population and they're very reluctant to get involved in different organisations and events or even go out to places like the gay bars and clubs because they do see it all geared toward gay & bisexual men.

I think a problem that contributes to that is that here in Northern Ireland we do have a very limited choice when it comes to The Scene. Now, granted, things are probably much better today than they were maybe ten or twenty years ago. But we still lack behind when it comes to places like London, Manchester, Birmingham and the other big cities around the UK. So it's not surprising that lesbian and bisexual women do feel very ostracised from the LGBT community because they don't feel that the support is there or that they are very welcome at some places.

Moving on, I think probably most of you would be aware of

the saying that children and young people should be seen and not heard. I think that this saying, while quite old, holds true for a lot of gay & lesbian youth today. In our youth group today we have a problem whereby young people are very reluctant to get involved in the LGBT community because they feel their issues and concerns are never listened to and that nobody takes any notice of them. Young people don't have a voice and feel they have nothing significant or worthwhile to offer. This seems to be a big problem for young people. At GLYNI, we try and encourage people to get involved in other organisations activities, but they feel as if there is no point to it, as if they're not going to get any benefit out of it, and as if people are going to just see their ideas and opinions as a joke.

I suppose an example of that is earlier this year when the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission approached GLYNI

and asked us if we would give our reaction and opinion to their recommendations on the Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. I think the members of GLYNI were quite shocked that an organisation like the Human Rights Commission had asked for our reaction. We were very pleased to take part in that kind of review and consultation process. But I think it was just the fact that the Human Rights Commission is a very important organisation and does very important work so the young people were very surprised that they were invited to take part. They were very happy to take part and hopefully that started the whole process off of getting more people involved and encouraging them to take part in other events.

I suppose another obvious barrier that restricts young LGBT people from getting involved more is of course geographical restrictions. It is the case that most of The Scene in Northern Ireland is centred around Belfast and

Derry. But you have to think about people who maybe live in western parts of Northern Ireland, maybe Enniskillen, Strabane or other places like Armagh. These young people really do have problems getting to Belfast or indeed Londonderry. It's not surprising then that these young people do feel very isolated. It is a real problem which I think needs to be addressed because they can't get the support they need and anybody who works with young lesbian & gay people will know that there are so many emotional issues there, the very difficult times that young people go through and that they really need the support at that early age. Unfortunately, if they do live in rural communities, that support is not getting to them.

Just to finish off, I would like to comment on an issue that was raised on Monday night at our own youth group event. GLYNI held an event on Monday night called Meet the Parents which was essentially

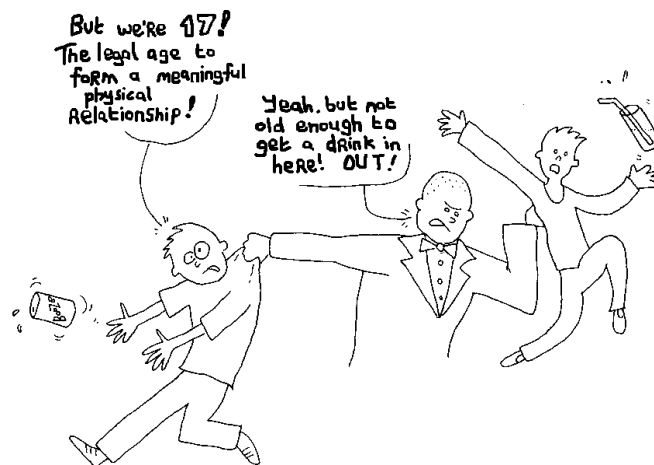
an information, educational and social night for parents of gay, lesbian and bisexual children. The whole aim of the event was really for the parents to come and find out more about our organisation and the services that are available here in Belfast for young people. It was a chance for our youth group to meet with the Parents' Advice Centre's support group for parents of LGBT children. One of the parents actually said that it's great that there are groups like GLYNI and QueerSpace and all the other support groups that are out there, but what about the people who are in fact under the age of sixteen who do know that they are gay, lesbian or bisexual, and have known for some time that they are not heterosexual. We're talking here about fourteen or fifteen year olds who can't for various reasons get involved with GLYNI or other organisation in Belfast. I do know that there are various legal reasons and rules and regulation with regard to

funding to prevent younger people under the age of sixteen from getting involved in some organisations.

But you can imagine what it must be like for a fourteen year old or fifteen year old who maybe is curious about their sexuality and has been aware for some time but just feels that they are really isolated. On the one hand, we live in quite a homophobic society where there is no support in schools and there is very limited support from friends and family; and yet, when they do try to get involved in the LGBT community, they can't because of their age, they are discriminated against because of their age. This is something

which we feel at GLYNI is very important to address, that there is very limited support, that there seems to be a void there which those younger members of the youth sector don't have access to.

I would like to sum up by saying those were just a few short points about the barriers which keep young people getting involved in the community here, but they are very significant and important to LGBT youth. Hopefully after tonight's discussion we'll be more aware of these issues and be more able to take some action with regard to breaking down these barriers.





Open Discussion

Mairéad

If people have questions and comments from the floor, put your hand up, please. You may address your questions to any member of the panel—or all of them, if you wish.

Audience Comment

I'm intrigued as to how the PSNI (Police Service of Northern Ireland) is working with your organisations.

Patricia Bray

I work in the Derry office of Disability Action and the police station is just opposite. They have actually come across for disability awareness training. Now, obviously, I'm not aware of anything else province-wide. But there are ongoing efforts to train officers in problems associated with disabilities. There is a problem with certain conditions, Parkinson's, for example, or MS, where people think they're drunk. Officers need training on these types of issues.

Audience Comment

I've a point of information on that. There has been input into the training of new recruits since about 1996. I was involved in the early days of the training. They started off with a day for meeting the different communities and divided it into four main communities coming along. One was the travellers; one was NICEM, one was disability and one was ourselves (the

LGBT community). They would divide into four different groups and spend time with each sector for a quarter of the day. As far as I know, something like that should be continuing. The PSNI, we got the impression, was very willing to talk to community groups and was definitely making a heck of an effort.

Karima Zahi

In addition to consultation, the PSNI is required to monitor crimes and incidences and report if they are racially motivated. For the past two years consultation has been taking place with ethnic minority communities to enable community affairs officers within the police and members of the community to meet and discuss issues of racially motivated crimes.

Terry Sergeant

From our point of view, we have a really good relationship with the PSNI. We built up a very good working relationship

with them over the past few years. We've worked very closely with them on the homophobic incident reporting campaign. There's a young fellow from our organisation who goes to some of their training sessions and is working toward the upcoming launch of their new 'Get Home Safe' campaign. As well, their minority liaison officer has paid us a number of visits. So we have a very good relationship with the PSNI.

Audience Comment

On Friday, the PSNI will be taking part in Pride by participating in an event called 'Protecting and Policing the LGBT Community' at the Belfast Unemployed Resource Centre at 6.30 pm. The community affairs branch is going to come and discuss homophobic incident reporting and the 'Get Home Safe' campaign.

Audience Comment

You see like Donegall Road, I had some friends up there who were actually threatened because they were gay. Sectarian groups causing problems. But I haven't seen much about that in the papers.

Audience Comment

His friend, a couple of weeks ago, came up to my mum's house, and someone knocked the windows in and told him that he had twenty-four hours to get out.

Audience Comment

If you or your friend want these incidents reported but don't want to report them yourself, you can go to one of the gay organisations and they will report it for you. Because the more of these incidents are logged, it gives the police less of an excuse for not doing something about them.

Audience Comment

But most people think it's just easier to move. It's a lot more dangerous to try and stand up to something like that.

Audience Comment

I'm not suggesting that you try and stop it. You should tell the police about it so that it's recorded. That way the police have a better picture of what's happened and can devote more money and resources on this area.

Audience Comment

On the [homophobic incident reporting] form, you don't actually have to state your name. The form can be sent in anonymously. And it can be reported through groups like GLYNI or the Rainbow Project. But it can be done anonymously so no one has to know it was you who reported it.

Audience Comment

Working with Lesbian Line, one of the biggest barriers for people becoming involved that we would be aware of is actually fear. Not just physical fear but fear of what your family think or fear for your job. A lot of people don't want to be seen to be gay. That's why they won't get involved with gay organisations. Because we're forced to be invisible to an extent.

But on a more heartening note, I think the whole equality agenda has been a very positive thing and has created networks within the equality coalition so that people from the different constituencies are more aware of the problems faced by each other. And we're sort of out there battling for each other now.

Patricia Bray

I totally agree with you. For years we all worked separately and have been very insular. With Section 75, we've started

to share our experiences and to work together to change attitudes. The equality agenda has allowed us to see what we have in common.

Mairéad

And you touched on it earlier, this whole issue of multi-identity. It's something that really needs to be recognised and acknowledged and widened in its scope.

Audience Comment

I'd like the panellists to comment on breaking down the barriers from within their own communities. For example, prejudice within the LGBT community against race or age or disability. And *vice versa*. There's a whole range of issues there, because we're all people and we've all got our own prejudices and there's issues such as resourcing that put up barriers to people's participation. There is prejudice within every community. How do we work on these issues?

Patricia Bray

I suppose we should look at equality training and disability awareness training for organisations such as QueerSpace. The organisations need to look to the other constituencies to find out what their needs are. For the case of disabilities, there are a few simple questions. Does your organisation have a text phone? They're not very expensive and make it easier for people who are hearing impaired to contact you. Is your written material produced in such a manner that it is accessible? Is the print size large? Do you welcome and include people with disabilities? There are ways of helping your organisation overcome barriers, and training is a part of this. To come together whenever possible and share experiences like tonight is a valuable tool to overcome barriers.

Karima Zahi

As employers and service providers, we need to be aware of the diversity of people, including LGBT people. We need to make conscious efforts that we actually do this and don't just talk about it and have nicely written policies. For example NICEM would also like to encourage member groups, we currently have 21 member organisations, to ensure that they have awareness training with regard to sexual orientation. We find that this is a very sensitive issue, especially with religious groups and groups which traditionally wouldn't have accepted people with different sexual orientations.

Audience Comment

In what ways are you currently working with schools? I believe most prejudices come from kids who don't actually know what they're saying. When they meet somebody who is gay and then become friends with them they stop

saying these things. People say things just because they don't know any better.

Patricia Bray

Disability Action have school programs where members of staff actually go around giving disability training. Because you're quite right. It's education and actually getting more people to talk about these issues. In our case, it's segregated education, where young people with disabilities are actually separated and sometimes young people have to go to so-called specialist schools because that's the best place for them. But if the schools were all in the one building where everyone goes through the gates together, play together, go home together, and can actually make friend with each other, that would eventually break down the barriers that segregated education imposes. But it's education, and sex education as well, which should be across the board and

should be used to change attitudes.

Audience Comment

Has anything been planned? Will the government do this?

Patricia Bray

I don't think so. I'm sure that Terry could speak to this, or CoSO could tell you what they're doing. With Section 75, the Department of Education have to talk with people from the LGBT community about these issues. But this change will be long term. Section 75 is just two years old. Policy change and culture change will take time, but the Department of Education should be talking to all nine categories. Sexual orientation should be talked about in schools.

Karima Zahi

There is a pilot programme which is underway which is dealing with citizenship. It should address issues such as

human rights. Although the nine categories are covered in the curriculum, some categories are required while others are optional. So really, it's down to the individual teacher to select whatever areas he or she would be comfortable with and would not have to deal with sexual orientation.

Audience Comment

Is it not true that the curriculum proposed for Religious Education ignored Hinduism, Buddhism and all other minority faiths and stuck entirely to the Christian faiths, with a very rigid and traditional interpretation of these faiths. There's no discussion of Islam for anyone of Pakistani or other Muslim background. Would you not be able to make common cause with Humanists and people representing a child who is gay? Religious Education discriminates against religions and sexual minorities.

Audience Comment

I can see you point. But really the problem is that in Northern Ireland education is sensitive anyway. It's going to be hard to get teachers to talk about these kinds of issues, sexual orientation or anything outside the norm. Surely if these issues are culturally sensitive for teachers, I'm not sure how much training teachers will get for teaching Local Citizenship.

Karima Zahi

There is an action plan to deal with human rights education of public authorities in the education sector. Some of these issues are being ignored, but there is work being done there, so we should see some changes in the future.

Audience Comment

Just to go over a few points, specifically in terms of disability within the community. Many venues have steps at their entrances, and the only accessible

entrance is the back where the trash is put out. When they redo the place, you think, here's an opportunity to make the place more accessible. But instead they put in more steps. Or they put in booths so that it's even more narrow. And three or four of the LGBT community groups, due to lack of funding, are based in buildings which aren't very accessible either, in fact they are three or four flights up. So even a slight disability could hamper their access.

And also talking about breaking down barriers, we've talked from a youth perspective. I see absent maybe someone from a senior citizens organisation. Maybe that's something that should be addressed. Perhaps we need an organisation like SAGE, Senior Action in a Gay Environment.

Audience Comment

The Northern Ireland Interfaith Forum have come up with a very good programme on

breaking down barriers between faiths. It's a very interesting training programme. You get a briefing paper on a faith which is not your own and then you ask the participants to defend this religion.

Audience Comment

I have a question for Terry. Was there not a homophobic bullying campaign in the schools a few years ago?

Terry Sergeant

There was a homophobic bullying campaign which was launched, but unfortunately schools and the Education & Library Boards didn't come on board and take much interest in it. So the campaign was just dropped because it was targeting schools. Gay and lesbian issues are considered too sensitive by the schools, so it's very difficult to get in there and do any work with that. GLYNI was involved with that campaign along with The Rainbow Project, Cara-Friend

and Foyle Friend. But unfortunately it just fell to the wayside.

Audience Comment

I understand that, because I'm a parent. I have a sixteen-year-old boy. My son came back one day and reported to his mother that they had had a nasty debate in school about homosexuality. Rude comments, crude comments, criminal comments made about homosexuals. Things like, what should you do with them: go out and kill them. If you're daddy's a homosexual, you should kill him, and things like that. So there are a lot of dreadful things said in school, there are highly charged emotions.

Karima Zahi

In most cases of homophobic bullying at schools, the teachers are actually aware

that the bullying is taking place. Very few schools actually have anti-homophobic bullying policies.

Audience Comment

Perhaps it's time that the organisation look into relaunching the homophobic bullying campaign, pointing out to the education boards that homophobic bullying has to be dealt with. And not just with schools—there are other organisations which deal with children where homophobic bullying takes place. I know one organisation of which I'm a member, the Scout's Association—homophobic bullying does take place within the Scouts. It should, and it needs to be stamped out. But it's not just the boys or the girls, it's the leaders as well.

QueerSpace apologises that the transcript of the audience discussion is incomplete. Due to technical problems, the recording halted at this point.

Appendix A

Conclusions and Recommendations

1. Society, including the LGBT Community, must acknowledge the prejudices which exist against ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, younger people and older people. Without admitting to these prejudices, it will be impossible to break down the barriers they create.
2. The concept of multiple identity and multiple discrimination must be mainstreamed, because people often face discrimination for a variety of reasons.
3. Organisations must develop best practice by introducing anti-oppressive policies and by challenging institutionalised discrimination.
4. Organisations must ensure that their policies are 'live' documents by putting their equal opportunities statements into practice.
5. Education of young people has played an unfortunate role in reinforcing negative stereotypes, from the segregated education of disabled children to the total disregard of all issues relating to the lives of queer people.
6. It is vital that schools educate young people together and teach them to respect the diversity of society and to value human and civil rights.

7. School boards need to cease treating sexual orientation as a taboo subject and promote respect for LGBT people.
8. LGBT organisations and businesses needs to hold more activities aimed at younger and older members of the community, who are often excluded through inappropriate choice of venues and the nature of the events.
9. More space needs to be made for women-only events, as activities of the LGBT Community often tend to be dominated by men.
10. LGBT organisations need to work hard to address the gender divide which exists within the LGBT community, to ensure that their organisations promote respect for all LGBT people.
11. LGBT organisations should undergo awareness training to help them discover areas where they may be inadvertently discriminating and oppressive policies which exclude certain groups of people.
12. Simple measures such as installing a text phone for the hearing impaired, making documents available in larger print and locating premises in physically accessible buildings will make LGBT organisations and business more approachable.

Appendix B About QueerSpace

Offices

QueerSpace currently holds its meetings and events in the Cara-Friend offices, Cathedral Buildings, 64 Donegall Street, Belfast BT1 2GT.

Contact

post: P.O. Box 160, Belfast
BT1 2AU
e: info@queerspace.org.uk
www.queerspace.org.uk

Collective Meetings

QueerSpace holds its Collective Meetings on every Wednesday from 7.30. Part business meeting, part social time, this is the time when QueerSpace makes its decisions.

InSpace

The InSpace drop-in provides the LGBT community an opportunity to come together in an alcohol- and drug-free environment to socialise and network. InSpace is held

every Saturday from 3.00 to 6.00 pm.

Mission

QueerSpace is a volunteer-led organisation based on collective planning and action which serves the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered Community of Belfast and Northern Ireland by raising its visibility, supporting its activities, providing it with resources and facilitating communication while adhering to the principals of community orientation, freedom of identity, ethical funding and accessibility.

Vision

QueerSpace envisions a society free from prejudice, with equal respect given to peoples of different sexual orientations and genders.

Visibility

QueerSpace seeks to increase the visibility of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered (LGBT) Community in a positive manner to counteract the

disregard and negative images presented to the general public over the past centuries.

Support

QueerSpace is dedicated to supporting, organising and publicising the artistic, educational, cultural and social activities of the LGBT community which are designed to: express cultural traditions through musical, dramatic and visual projects; increase the understanding of the historical background and current status of the LGBT community in and around Belfast; provide an interface for groups within and outside of the LGBT community; foster open and inclusive debate and dialogue concerning questions of identity, difference and division; and influence opinion on particular issues which are directly relevant to the QueerSpace Mission and experience.

Resources

QueerSpace strives to procure the human, physical and capital resources for the LGBT

community which have for so long been denied this sector of the community.

Communication

QueerSpace will facilitate communication among the diverse groups within the LGBT community and with those outside of the LGBT community.

Community Orientated

QueerSpace is an expression of the Belfast LGBT community and no QueerSpace policy or action should be allowed to relinquish any element of LGBT community control. QueerSpace recognizes and promotes the interdependence of the diverse groups within the LGBT community

Freedom of Identity

QueerSpace operates under a non-judgemental policy and is open to all identities. No member of QueerSpace will be asked to hide or change any element of their identity. It is the policy of QueerSpace to have respect for diversity.

Ethical Funding

QueerSpace exists at the will of the community, and recognizes that important sources of its income are donations from the community. All outside funding shall be carefully sourced as to not restrict the scope of the QueerSpace mission.

Accessibility

QueerSpace is committed to equity and makes all due effort to ensure equality of access to its programmes, resources, facilities and decision making processes

Vision

QueerSpace envisions a society free from prejudice, with equal respect given to peoples of different sexual orientations and genders.

Mainstreaming

QueerSpace will strive to ensure that (1) respect for individuals regardless of sexual orientation and gender and (2) positive images of the LGBT community are integrated into the everyday life of individuals,

communities and organisations.

Co-operation

QueerSpace will work with other groups and organisations to empower LGBT people to provide solutions to the issues that affect their lives.

Leadership

QueerSpace will be pro-active in carrying out its Mission and pursuing its Vision and will seek to show others the way forward.

Accountability

QueerSpace recognises that its resources are limited and will endeavour to make their use transparent and effective.

Effectiveness

QueerSpace will set realistic and achievable targets for its programmes related to QueerSpace Mission and will evaluate its programmes in order to demonstrate their effectiveness and unique contribution.

Organisation

QueerSpace operates as collective, making decisions by consensus based on community input, at Weekly Collective Meetings.

Building the Community

The QueerSpace Mission is concerned with involving the people of the LGBT community in the issues that affect their lives.

QueerSpace enhances the ability of LGBT people and groups to act together and effect changes in their lives by providing support and resources.

QueerSpace involves members of the LGBT community and harnesses their skills, knowledge and experiences so that they become empowered and can take the initiative to respond to the problems that arise in their lives.

QueerSpace strives to be a leader in the fight against prejudice and inequality, not just in issues dealing with

sexual orientation and gender but also in all issues where prejudice and inequality exist.

Through its Weekly Collective Meetings, QueerSpace is in constant consultation with the LGBT community.

QueerSpace depends upon the active participation of the LGBT community, its groups and its people.

QueerSpace is fully committed to the principal of equity and makes all due effort to ensure equality of access to its programmes, resources, facilities and decision making processes.

The goals of QueerSpace when working with LGBT people are to develop awareness and understanding of the issues that affect their lives, to develop the knowledge base, skills and confidence necessary to combat prejudice and inequality and to develop increased access to information, rights and resources.

QueerSpace promotes inter-dependence within the LGBT community, improving the understanding that each sector of the LGBT community has of each other by creating networks with other LGBT organisations, examining the history of the LGBT community and fostering discussions and debates about its place in society and working to promote the rights of LGBT people.

Promoting Equality

The QueerSpace Mission is concerned with promoting equality of opportunity for member of the LGBT community.

QueerSpace does not discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation, gender, marital status, HIV status, race, ethnicity, nationality, religious belief, political opinion, disability, employment status, socio-economic status or status as a carer.

QueerSpace recognises and values differences among

individuals and works to promote the potential of individuals.

QueerSpace respects persons from diverse backgrounds within our organisation, the LGBT community, and the general public.

QueerSpace develops relationships of trust and respect in which even delicate or divisive issues can be discussed and promotes the freedom of individuals to discuss sensitive issues in a non-threatening environment.



Appendix C LGBT Organisations

Cara-Friend

Counselling, befriending and information organisation.

offices: Cathedral Buildings,
64 Donegall Street, Belfast
BT1 2GT.

helpline: (028) 9032 2023
Mon – Wed, 7.30 – 10.00 pm

tel / fax: (028) 9027 8636

e: admin@cara-friend.org.uk
www.cara-friend.org.uk

Foyle Friend

LGBT resource centre serving
the northwest of Ireland.

offices: 32 Great James
Street, Derry / Londonderry /
Doire, BT48 7DB

drop-in: Mon-Fri, 12.00 – 5.00
pm, Sat 2.00 – 4.00 pm

helpline: (028) 7126 4400,
7.30 – 10.00 pm

tel: (028) 7126 3120

fax: (028) 7136 3751

e: info@foylefriend.org
www.foylefriend.org

CoSO

The Coalition on Sexual
Orientation is a coalition of
LGBT organisations (including
QueerSpace) throughout NI.

offices: 2-6 Union Street,
Belfast BT1 2JF

tel: (028) 9031 9030

fax: (028) 9031 9031

e: admin@coso.org.uk

www.coso.org.uk

GLYNI

Gay & Lesbian Youth Northern
Ireland provides a safe space
for young lesbians, gay men
and bisexuals aged 16-25.

meetings: Mon, 6.30 – 9.30
pm, Cara-Friend offices

tel / fax: (028) 9027 8636

e: admin@glyni.org.uk

www.glyni.org.uk

LASI

Lesbian Advocacy Services
Initiative.

post: c/o WSN, 109-113 Royal
Avenue, Belfast BT1

tel: (028) 9023 6923

e: lasidykes@hotmail.com

Lesbian Line (Belfast)

Helpline and social support for lesbian and bisexual women.

helpline: (028) 9023 8668,
Thur, 7.30 – 10.00 pm

Monthly Lesbian Line Events:

Literary Lesbians, 3.00 – 6.00 pm, 1st Sunday, Cara-Friend offices, book group

Dances with Dykes, 9.00 pm to late, 3rd Sunday, The Custom House, Skipper Street, women-only disco

Sunday Scene drop-in, 3.00 – 6.00 pm, 3rd Sunday, Cara-Friend offices

OutRadio, 9.00 – 10.00 pm, 3rd Saturday, NVR 100.6 fm

NIGRA

The Northern Ireland Gay Rights Association is Belfast's oldest gay rights organisation.

meetings: 1st Thursday, Cara-Friend offices

post: P.O. Box 44, Belfast BT1 2GT

tel: (028) 9066 4111

The Rainbow Project

Providing support, counselling, advocacy, training, research, and information on HIV and safer sex for gay and bisexual men.

In Belfast

offices: 2-6 Union Street, Belfast BT1 2JF

drop-in: Mon-Fri, 12.30 – 5.30 pm

tel: (028) 9031 9030

fax: (028) 9031 9031

In the north-west

offices: 37 Clarendon Street, Derry / Londonderry / Doire BT48 7ER

tel: (028) 7138 3030

www.rainbowproject.com





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