

# Beyond Abuse: LGBT accommodation- based domestic abuse services

## PROJECT OVERVIEW



stonewall  
housing

*"I would like to thank you for the help and the support you provided to me in order to keep my legs on earth during the time I needed someone to be there for me while most didn't care about my broken young soul."*

Safiya – 23 years old migrant trans woman

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# 1. Overview

Brighton & Hove City Council and the London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham secured funding as part of the Department of Communities and Local Government 2016 / 18 'Fund for refuges, specialist accommodation-based support and service reform to help local areas meet the Priorities for Domestic Abuse Services'. Manchester City Council was also successful in securing funding for a linked partnership bid.

Funded for a year this LGBT accommodation-based project has been made up of partners in the three cities that are identified as beacon cities for LGBT communities to which LGBT people may travel, seeking validation. This is reported in Stonewall Housing's 'Finding Safe Spaces' Report

The service delivery partners in the project have been Stonewall Housing, Brighton Rise and LGBT Foundation. Stonewall Housing's project was specific to the tri-boroughs of Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster and Manchester and Brighton specific to their geographical areas. Coordinated by Stonewall Housing this has been an effective piece of national multi agency work across regions and with partners both from the LGBT sector and the VAWG (Violence against Women and Girls) sector.

Currently, nationally there are very few services that respond to the specific needs of LGBT survivors of domestic abuse. The overarching aim of the project was to increase the provision of services in order to meet the needs of LGBT survivors of domestic abuse in Brighton, London and Manchester. This was achieved by increasing the availability of specialist accommodation and intensive outreach support in these areas.

Project organisations engaged with housing partners to provide support to survivors in dispersed accommodation- Manchester having four self-contained units supplied by Great Places and Brighton the same number. For various reasons the London based accommodation proved more difficult to secure and consequently that part of the national project has run without accommodation.

## 2. Service developments

Due to recruitment issues projects had staggered start times with the London project being the first project up and running. Due to the staggered start times, issues with staff recruitment and some further funding the three partner projects have different end dates.

National and operational strategic regular meetings were held on a regular basis and operational staff were connected. Cross service referrals have been built into the referral pathways and although in small numbers there were some referrals between Brighton and London. There has been useful cross project advice and information sharing with regular contact between the operational staff.

Referral pathways were established regionally as established LGBT and VAWG organisations were involved in the regions. For example, Stonewall Housing are working in Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster with organisations from both sectors and it was important for them to establish their referral pathways early on in the project. LGBT foundation and Brighton Rise both worked with Housing Providers and in the case of LGBT foundation a VAWG sector organisation (Independent Choices).

Both Brighton and London projects secured funding for a peer support worker. Brighton struggled to recruit and eventually made a decision to run their project without a peer support worker. London's peer support workers role ended in June 2018.

The London project also included a floating support worker in addition to the domestic abuse advocate. This was a decision made after it became clear that the London project would struggle to secure housing and would therefore be supporting more people in their own homes.

## 3. Data

### How do we collect our data?

Establishing a data collection system nationally enabled us to provide a consistent approach to data collection.

After partnership discussions it was decided to use evaluation statements based on the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well Being Score (WEMWBS) with the addition of two questions around feelings of safety. This choice would also ensure data sets across the national project would provide us with a more robust analysis of the data. We collected data at various points during the survivor's journey through the services from point of referral to exit from the service.

### What does the data tell us?

Collective referrals to the project across the three cities numbered 125 which is in excess of our original targets. The majority of referrals have been from the Manchester/London projects (69 Manchester, 44 London and 12 Brighton). The data sets show there are marked improvements in health and wellbeing scores for people using these services.

The data shows people are reporting increased levels of safety, particularly in the case of those able to access accommodation. There was a 55% improvement in mental health and wellbeing for clients in London. Brighton reported a 100% improvement in the question about feeling safe where you live reflecting the impact on health and wellbeing of securing safe accommodation.

The data shows a number of presentations of domestic abuse including a significant number who report coercive control as a feature of their narrative. Use of sexual orientation and gender identity are a significant part of an LGBT power and control dynamic and reported coercive control reflects this.

The London project in particular highlighted a significant trend of the use of immigration status and the threat of deportation to countries where identifying as LGBT is illegal, in the coercive control narrative of clients.

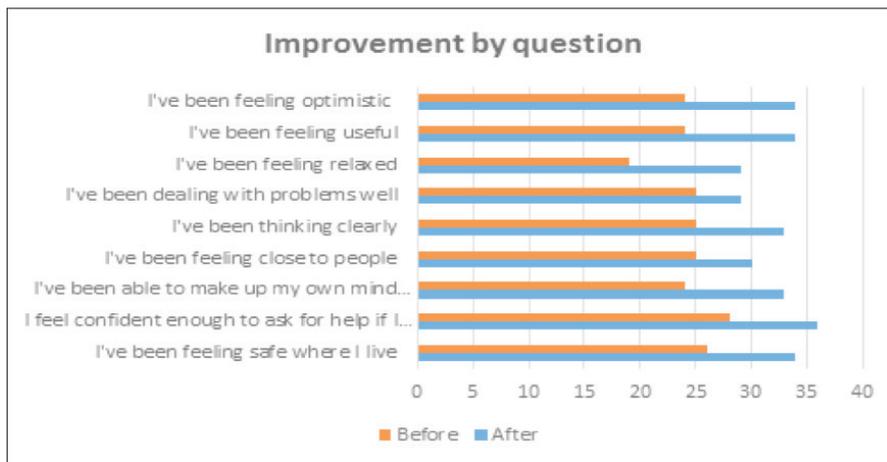
Although the London project was mostly restricted to tri-borough referrals because of the cross project referral pathway, London received two referrals from Brighton.

Less restricted by referral area Manchester received referrals not only from the Greater Manchester area but also outside of Greater Manchester. These areas included Wales, Newcastle, Leeds, Nottingham, Blackpool, and Grimsby.

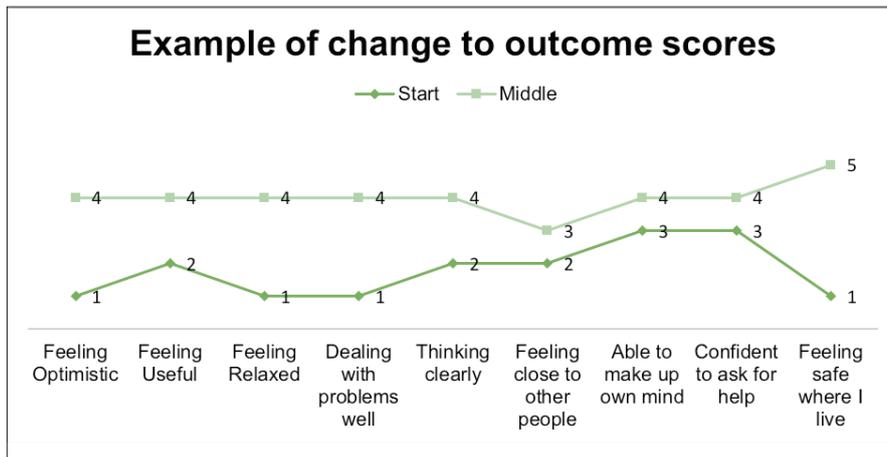
The majority of Brighton referrals (8 out of 12) were from Brighton but again less restricted to referral areas they received some referrals from outside Brighton (including 2% from project partners Stonewall Housing). These referrals came from Ealing, Leeds, Leicester and Richmond upon Thames.

The charts illustrate outcomes using the WEMWBS data sets.

**Peer support outcomes London (example)**



**LGBT Foundation (example of WEMBWS outcomes)**



*An example of one individual who has filled in more than one outcome measurements form. The time between both of the forms being completed is exactly three months. As you can see that has been an improvement in every area with the feeling of safety in their home going from a one to a five after moving property.*

## 4. Who is using our service?

Throughout the programme nationally we have seen the majority of referrals for male self-identified survivors. (65% in London, 66% in Manchester and 62% in Brighton). We have also seen people who self-identify as female, trans, non-binary, queer, and other.

In terms of self-identified sexual orientation, the majority of our clients have identified as gay. We have also seen people who identify as pansexual, queer, questioning, lesbian and other. In the London project we have also worked with people with diverse gender identities who identify as heterosexual.

Our age range of people we have worked with has been from 16-69.

Demographically the projects varied in terms of the ethnicity of those using the services. London saw a large percentage of people who identified as BAME (50%) whereas the majority of clients in Manchester and Brighton identified as White British. This may reflect the demographic of the tri- boroughs and is in line with the demographic for clients of Stonewall Housing – currently the majority of clients identify as BAME.

## 5. Challenges

Funded for a year there were challenges associated with the length of the project and recruitment. This and securing the accommodation proved to be a longer process than anticipated which then impacted the start up of each regional project.

For the London project unable to secure accommodation this remained a constant throughout and the project ran without access to dedicated accommodation based safe space. Only taking tri-borough referrals (apart from the cross project referrals) also meant that the referrals to the London project were restricted. Had the service been pan-London we would anticipate a larger numbers or referrals, although this would have required more project staff costs.

The time-restricted project also was a challenge with external providers particularly those housing providers that the projects were relying on to provide units for accommodation. Some external providers were not prepared to engage with such a short project.

The London project was offered accommodation but at a three year lease of £55,000 per annum this didn't fit in with the project brief and therefore this was declined. Both Manchester and Brighton secured accommodation but it was during the lifetime of the project and not at initial start-up.

This caused some delays with developing the projects. Ideally, if the project were to be repeated, our recommendation would be that the accommodation was secured as early as possible and that additional months were factored into the project in order to facilitate this.

Bringing together a national project with regional variations means we have had to be flexible in our approach although regular cross project communication has meant that we have been able to share problems and solutions.

## 6. What have we learnt?

Funded for a year, one of the issues of a short-term funded project is that the time spent setting up the project leaves little time for actual implementation of the project. It also leaves little time for evaluation and impact measuring and means it's not possible to measure impact over time.

Based on previous experience from Brighton's smaller pilot we took a decision not to advertise the project in London and Brighton. Manchester advertised their project but decided not to reference the accommodation.

Our referral rates per project have exceeded targets in London and Manchester. Brighton has had some gaps in their provision which may have impacted on their outcomes, especially compared to their previous GBT refuge project.

A major factor was a lack of properties, having lost their previous housing partner, which led to a strategic decision not to advertise the service but to just take referrals from RISE's own LGBT IDVA service. There were also changes of personnel and to partnership working which contributed to the reduced visibility of the service.

Although we are aware from previous domestic abuse research projects (see, for example, *ROAR: Because silence is deadly*,

*Stonewall Housing, 2014*)) that some LGBT survivors would rather use LGBT community groups or family of choice to approach for support rather than mainstream services, it's also true that RISE has long experience of good accessibility to and engagement with the LGBT community.

It is clear from the data that the greatest need for the service has been for gay, bi and trans(GBT) men. In the context of lack of generic provision for this group this is not surprising.

Cross project support and sharing of best practice has been an integral part of the project and proved to be an important part of the project. Sharing information and providing advice and support to colleagues in other areas connected the regional project workers and gave the project a cohesive national identity.

Whilst securing the accommodation was successful in two areas what was less successful was the provision of move on accommodation for those people who were safely housed. The concept was always that accommodation provided was temporary and would mimic refuge type provision in that people would stay for a short period of time and then move on to more permanent accommodation with floating support in place if needed.

However, both areas that had secured accommodation struggled with moving people on from the housing units with one local authority not recognising that the accommodation was temporary.

The effect of this is that what is supposed to be emergency temporary housing becomes long term housing and the units are no longer available for people fleeing domestic abuse.

## 7. What's next?

Lack of current provision for LGBT people in domestic abuse services and services that are not LGBT affirmative means that LGBT people are marginalised

There is an overall need for more inclusive specialist support that is competent to address significant complexities and intersectional oppression (racism, sexism, ableism etc.) experienced by LGBT people. LGBT people may experience any range of institutional, structural and interpersonal abuses throughout their lives. These experiences impact on how LGBT people understand and respond to domestic abuse.

Anecdotal evidence suggests many survivors have difficulty finding culturally competent and non-traumatizing supports due to overall stigma, lack of economic resources, or the absence available community outreach programs. If service providers do not understand the needs and priorities of LGBT survivors and intersecting oppressions that exist, their work may cause more harm than good.

Undoubtedly this innovative multi agency project even in its incomplete form (lack of accommodation in London) demonstrates that the project impacted positively on the lives of LGBT survivors of domestic abuse.

WEMWBS scores in all three projects have shown marked improvements for survivors as a result of LGBT specific services. We are also producing a social impact value assessment report in January 2019.

Due to issues with regional funding and staffing the projects have had discrete closing dates. The London project finished in October 2018, the Brighton project is due to end in the spring of next year and the Manchester project has been fortunate enough to secure ongoing funding.

## 8. Recommendations

- Services delivering specialist support to LGBT survivors should be appropriately resourced and supported by long-term, sustainable funding which enables and includes evaluation of program impact and outcomes and generates enough evidence on good practice that supports bidding for funding with commissioners
- There should be a national coordinated LGBT domestic abuse strategy with accommodation options including refuge and move on accommodation. It should be a collaborative approach with LGBT service providers, mainstream domestic abuse providers and commissioners.
- Professionals working in the sector need to recognise that domestic abuse affects the LGBT community and need to access appropriate training on distinct experiences of LGBT people with domestic violence and abuse. There is an overall need for more inclusive specialist support that are competent to address significant complexities and intersectional oppression (racism, sexism, ableism etc) brought on board by LGBT people.
- There is a need for service provision that is 'led by and for' the communities.
- The approach to commissioning specialist services by commissioners should include measures on how to commission LGBT specialist services and/or to ensure that services effectively meet the needs of LGBT survivors

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