

# **GIVING LGBT YOUTH a VOICE & SHOWING them the YELLOW BRICK ROAD**

## **OUTLINE:**

- ❑ Background on The Metro Centre and the youth services offered
- ❑ Introduction to Sexuality
- ❑ Coming Out
- ❑ Homophobia & Levels Homophobia
- ❑ Resilience of LGBT Young People
- ❑ Impact of Homophobia
- ❑ Conclusions
- ❑ Q & A

## **Youth Services:**

- ❑ Under 25 Youth Counselling Service offering short term and long term counselling
- ❑ 1-2-1 Youth Support, Information & Guidance
- ❑ Youth Groups in the London Boroughs of Bexley, Bromley, Greenwich and Lewisham
- ❑ Tribe Under 16 Youth Support Group
- ❑ Youth Outreach
- ❑ Youth Forum
- ❑ Youth & Statutory Liaison Work & **Coming Soon:**
- ❑ **Pit Stop Youth Sexual Health Clinic**
- ❑ **Condoms - in - the - post – scheme**
- ❑ **Metro Safe - Mentor Support Program**
- ❑ **HIV Living Well PSMP Youth Program**

## **The Nature of Human Sexuality**

- ❑ **THE SEXUALITY “BIO”-SPHERE**
- ❑ **A person’s sexuality is made up of three parts:**

## **The “BIO”- Sphere**

- ❑ A person’s sexual orientation, identity, and behavior do not always necessarily match.
- ❑ A person may engage in heterosexual behavior but feel their sexual orientation is homosexual.
- ❑ **EXAMPLE:** A man who is attracted to other guys may decide to identify as straight, and have sex mainly with women but occasionally with other guys.

## **Sexual Identity**

- ❑ How a person sees themselves, and puts themselves across to others.
- ❑ Refers to the orientation or ‘label’ that people choose to identify as - whether it be heterosexual, gay, lesbian, or bi.

## **Sexual Orientation**

- ❑ At the core of the sphere, and thus at the very inner of a person. This refers to the nature of a person’s basic sexual attraction to other people, and who they tend to form their primary loving and sexual relationships with.
- ❑ It considers a person’s sexual fantasies, thoughts, dreams, and emotional feelings.

## **Heterosexual:**

- ❑ A person who is emotionally, spiritually, physically, and/or sexually attracted to people of the opposite gender (also “straight”).

## **Lesbian:**

- ❑ A woman who is emotionally, spiritually, physically, and/or sexually attracted to other women. Some lesbians prefer to use the terms “gay woman” or “dyke”.

## **Gay man:**

- ❑ A man who is emotionally, spiritually, physically, and/or sexually attracted to other men.

## **Homosexual:**

- ❑ A person who is emotionally, spiritually, physically, and/or sexually attracted to people of the same gender.

- ❑ no longer the preferred term – historically used to describe what was considered a medical or psychological illness.

## **Bisexual:**

- ❑ A man or woman who is emotionally, spiritually, physically, and/or sexually attracted to people of either gender.

## **Transgender:**

- ❑ An umbrella term used to describe those who transgress societal gender norms, defy rigid, bipolar gender constructions, and who express or present a breaking and/or blurring of cultural/stereotypical gender roles.
- ❑ This includes transsexuals, cross-dressers or transvestites, and drag queens or kings.
- ❑ If an individual prefers to be called transsexual, drag queen or king, use that term.

## **Sexual Behaviour**

- ❑ This is how the person acts out their orientation and identity.
- ❑ Namely, sexual activity they have undertaken in the past and continue to engage in.

## **Coming Out:**

You have been split into groups, please discuss and answer the following questions:

1. What is coming out?
2. Why come out in the first place?
3. What is the potential impact of a young person 'coming out'?
4. What is the potential impact of a young person telling somebody about their sexuality?
5. For what period of time can you expect the coming out process to last for lesbians, gay men and bisexuals?

## **Coming Out**

- ❑ The process of an LGBT person becoming aware, understanding and accepting their sexual orientation or gender identity and sharing this with others as they choose.
- ❑ The ongoing process of decision-making about the level of openness a person feels in disclosing this information to another person or people.

## **The Self Esteem Cycle of a LGBT Young Person**

- Let's now look at the cycle of an LGBT young person facing discrimination in their school, youth club or community setting

### **Homophobia:**

- The irrational fear of feelings of love for members of the same sex, and therefore the hatred or intolerance of people who also have, or are perceived to have, those feelings.

### **Levels of Homophobia**

- **Internalised homophobia**

Lesbians, gay and bisexual people who are socialised in a homophobic society often internalise negative stereotypes and can develop some degree of low self esteem and self hatred.

### **Levels of Homophobia**

- **Interpersonal homophobia**

Individual behaviour based on personal homophobia. Hatred or dislike displayed towards others who are, or are perceived to be, gay, lesbian, or bisexual

### **Levels of Homophobia**

- **Institutional homophobia**

The many ways in which government, business, churches and other institutions and organisations discriminate against gay and lesbian people.

### **Levels of Homophobia**

- **Cultural homophobia**

Social standards or norms that support the over-representation of heterosexuality as 'better' and more morally correct, pervading all forms of media.

Often heterosexual people are not aware that these standards even exist while LGB people can be painfully aware of them.

# Levels of Homophobia

## □ Personal or internalised homophobia

Where the fear or hatred of homosexuality exists as a thought inside a person's head.

For heterosexual people this **personal homophobia** can be around being perceived as being lesbian, gay or bisexual, which can lead to trying to 'prove' one's heterosexuality

# Enough Chatting Now Ur Turn...

In your groups, you will be given a case study, in your group you need to think of the following areas:

- What are the issues that 'X' is facing?
- What effect has this had on 'X'?
- What would be your immediate action?
- What support would you need in handling this case and where would you refer the client on to?

# LGBT Youth Matters - Be Healthy

## **Suicide and self-harm**

- Studies consistently show that a high percentage of gay and lesbian youth (25-30%) attempt suicide.
- LGB youth are 4 to 5 times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual counterparts.

## **Substance abuse**

- Alcohol and drug abuse affects an estimated 20-30% of the gay and lesbian population – a rate that is two to three times higher than the general population.
- A significant factor to specific to LGB people is that the gay scene is predominantly based around bars, clubs, and pubs. It could be argued that this social reality encourages alcohol use and abuse; it certainly facilitates these. (ReachOUT, Social Inclusion report, London 1999)

## **Eating disorders**

- Young gay men are much more likely to have an eating disorder than heterosexual men are. 20% of gay men engaged in disordered eating behavior, compared with 5% heterosexual men.
- A condition called "muscle dysmorphia" (also known as "reverse anorexia" or "bigorexia") is also common amongst gay men. They pump iron, eat and take steroids to swell to ever-larger proportions, whilst being ashamed of their bodies.

## **Sexual Health**

- The reason young gay men often give is that HIV is no longer the death sentence it once was. Indeed there's now research confirming that the increase in high-risk sexual behavior is connected to the advent of combination HIV antiretroviral therapy. New drug therapies have given gay men with a misplaced complacency; many believe that contracting HIV is not such a big deal anymore, certainly not a risk to life. Such reasoning is common in young men who still believe in their immortality. 2005 The Sociology of Barebacking, Michael Shernoff

## LGBT Youth Matters - Stay Safe

## LGBT Youth Matters - Enjoy & Achieve

### Homophobic Bullying:

- Almost **two thirds (65%)** of young lesbian, gay and bisexual people experience homophobic bullying in Britain's schools.
- **97%** of lesbian and gay pupils hear derogatory phrases such as 'dyke' or 'poof' used in school
- **98%** of lesbian and gay pupils hear 'that's so gay' or 'you're so gay' at school
- **75%** of young gay people in faith schools experience homophobic bullying and are less likely than pupils in other schools to report it.
- **Only a quarter** of schools say that **homophobic bullying is wrong**
- gay young people are **60% more likely not to have been bullied.**
- **30%** of lesbian and gay pupils report that adults are responsible for homophobic incidents in their schools
- **Of those who have been bullied:**
  - **92%** have experienced verbal homophobic bullying
  - **41%** physical bullying
  - **17%** death threats
- **(Taken from the Schools Report – the experiences of young gay people in Britain's schools Stonewall Education for all 2007)**
  
- From Metro's own data on our young service users, 26% have attempted suicide and 32% have self-harmed. Those that reported being bullied at school were more than twice as likely to attempt suicide than those who did not. In addition we have found that 22% are not working and claiming benefits, 13% have no GCSEs (nb this does not include those who have not yet got GCSEs because they are too young), 44% have been bullied at school and 18% have been excluded or suspended from school.

## LGBT Youth Matters - Achieve Economic Wellbeing

- **Homelessness:** Studies consistently show that about 1 in 10 gay, lesbian and bisexual young people are compelled to leave or are thrown out of home because of their sexuality.
- **Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulation 2003** has not removed discrimination in the workplace but has made it **illegal**
- **Equality Bill April 2007**, making it illegal to discriminate against lesbians and gay men in the provision of goods and services
- **Homophobic Bullying** "I was spat on, and had my chain ripped from my neck and pencils thrown at me. I was pushed and had eggs thrown at me. I was made fun of, laughed at, threatened and intimidated. I was called names like Queer or Poof and shouted at. When I lashed back I was suspended for the schools safety."  
Young Person Aged 16

# LGBT Youth Matters – Making a Positive Contribution

- The Metro Youth Forum were involved in re-opening a youth project when a local authority tried to shut its doors to their LGBQ Youth Project and how they learnt that it is important to speak up and have their say in what services are offered to them. 'We showed the local authority that it is not just Every Child Matters, but that LGBQ young people that are rarely included in policy - do matter!'

## 10 SIMPLE STEPS TO COMBATTING HOMOPHOBIA

- Make no assumption about sexuality.
- Have something gay-related visible in your office or environment.
- Support and validate a young person's feelings about their sexuality.
- Do not advise young people to come out to parents, family and friends as they need to come out at their own safe pace.
- Guarantee confidentiality with Young People.
- Challenge Homophobia.
- Combat Heterosexism in your environment.
- Learn about appropriate organisations and LGB projects, help lines etc in your locality.
- Encourage the adoption and enforcement of anti-discrimination policies within your organisation to include sexual orientation.
- Provide Role Models.

(Adapted from Connexions document: *Information and Guidance on Engaging Young Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People*)

## Examples of methods to promote risk and resilience in young people

### HIV Living Well PSMP

- Pam, Female Aged 26, from Zimbabwe arrived in UK seven years ago:  
"Diagnosed HIV+ 2 years ago, 5 months after diagnosis attended the HIV Living Well PSMP. The group I attended was mixed young and old, this made me feel protected, listening to people that had lived through the 80's and 90's AIDS epidemic I looked up to and thought wow! It kept me going at my time of crisis. On leaving the course I had a new perspective on life and wanted to start living again, I then went on to train to be a facilitator and now facilitate on the cancer PSMP program. I'm excited to hear that there is going to be a Youth Program and looking forward to being involved"

## Examples of methods to promote risk and resilience in young people

### Metro Metrosafe

'Andrew' was 28 when he told his friends he was gay during a mates' weekend in Amsterdam. It was a surprise to even him and came out accidentally thanks to lots of booze and drugs. Feeling he ought to fit the part, his first sexual encounters, unsafe and alcohol-fuelled followed. Then an HIV test, panic and remorse. But he was lucky: he was negative, and his health advisor told him about *Metrosafe*.

Andrew started the program without even knowing how to put on a condom. His self-esteem was also very low, which was why he used alcohol to help with sexual exploration, yet he couldn't see this. Though he'd often drink until blacking out, alcohol, he claimed, was within his control.

Now having completed *Metrosafe*, Andrew has "started thinking about how alcohol can affect his life" and is drinking much less. He's finally found a new job and has stopped taking sexual risks. In his own words, addressing his sexuality was something he "could only have done in these sessions" and has left him "more confident and assured".

## Conclusions

- When working with a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender youth client I have to acknowledge their experience of the Racial, Social, Political and Cultural context of the community they live in. In Metro's Youth Work we provide positive 'out' role models and a supportive space where youth clients can develop a positive sexuality
- Domonic Davies "Clients who are lesbian, gay or bisexual have different life experiences from those of their heterosexual counterparts. This difference needs to be taken into account rather than pathologised in therapeutic (or

in caring) work, just as much as the experience of Black clients who live in a dominant, racist society. As a therapist, guided by gay affirmative principles, I therefore see homosexuality, bisexuality and transgender as valid and rich orientations in their own right" (Davies 1996: 40)

- Homophobia can have very adverse effect on mental health including low self-esteem, drug and alcohol abuse, self-harm, depression, difficulty with intimacy, neuroses, and suicide.

Good Practice Guidelines in Working with Lesbians, Gay Men and Bisexuals in Mental Health Services - PACE