

Stonewall

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WHO ARE YOU?

Stonewall is the lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) equality charity. Based in London, Edinburgh and Cardiff, Stonewall campaigns for legal and social equality for LGB people across Britain. We are also using our established lobbying skills to make sure the UK Government and European Union do all they can through their diplomacy and international aid programmes to support LGB equality world-wide. This includes sharing our lobbying approach and tools with activists in other countries who are fighting for their rights and risking their lives to enjoy the same levels of equality as LGB people in Britain.

HOW DID YOU START?

Stonewall was founded in 1989 as a direct response to Section 28 of the Local Government Act. Section 28 was an offensive piece of legislation designed to prevent the so-called 'promotion' of homosexuality in schools. As well as stigmatising gay people it also galvanised the gay community.

The aim from the outset was to create a professional lobbying group that would prevent such attacks on lesbians, gay men and bisexuals from ever occurring again. Stonewall has subsequently put the case for equality on the mainstream political agenda by winning support within all the main political parties.

WHAT IS STONEWALL'S MISSION?

We work to secure legal and social equality for LGB people. Stonewall focuses on three key areas for equality: at home, at school and at work. LGB people still face very real inequality in all three areas.

For example, at home LGB people's experience of using health care services can be extremely poor, homophobic hate crime is still prevalent, and the denial of goods or services because of a person's sexual orientation is still an issue.

At school, anti-gay bullying and language is still widespread. Gay pupils who are bullied are at higher risk of suicide, self-harm and depression. There are challenges

too for schools in recognising that children now come from families that contain sexual diversity, with same-sex parenting becoming more visible.

At work, we know that LGB people perform better when they can be themselves; so we work with employers across Britain to make sure that their workplaces will support LGB people to achieve their full potential.

WHAT SERVICES DO YOU PROVIDE?

Our free Info Line offers advice and information on issues affecting LGB people. We respond to resource requests and can signpost people on if it's a request that we're unable to answer ourselves. All our resources can also be ordered through our website and most can be downloaded from there too.

In addition, Stonewall's 'Healthy Lives' programme supports health organisations to improve their workplaces and their services for LGB people. Our Health Champions Programme, funded by the Department of Health, is providing free support for 1 year to 20 National Health Service (NHS) organisations in England to improve health services for LGB people. The programme offers member organisations practical advice to help them achieve real improvements in the care they provide to local LGB people and their families.

Each Health Champion receives consultancy support, a free initial needs assessment based on Stonewall health research, support to establish a LBG network group for staff, and access to NHS-specific training on sexual orientation equality. There's also support in entering the Stonewall Healthcare Equality Index, an annual exercise to benchmark and track health care organisations on how well they are meeting the health needs of LGB people.

WHAT'S BEEN YOUR BIGGEST TRIUMPH OVER THE YEARS?

Most recently, seeing the Same Sex Marriage Act become law was a real triumph.

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Over the years Stonewall has also helped secure many steps forward for equality such as the equalisation of the age of consent, lifting the ban on lesbians and gay men serving in the military, securing legislation allowing same-sex couples to adopt, repeal of Section 28, and outlawing discrimination by goods and service providers against LGB people on the grounds of their sexual orientation.

Even our less well known successes have had a huge impact. The Human Fertilisation and Embryology (Parental Orders) Regulations has extended the group of people who can apply for a parental order following surrogacy to include both unmarried couples and same-sex partners. We also achieved a change to the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority's policies, removing the requirement from clinics to consider the 'need for a father' before granting treatment and instead focus on 'supportive parenting'; this dismantled a discriminatory barrier against lesbians (and single women) accessing infertility treatment.

WHAT'S BEEN YOUR BIGGEST PROBLEM?

Lesbians and bisexual women have specific health needs, but there can be a real lack of understanding among NHS and health care staff that these needs exist. Our lesbian health research – which surveyed over 6000 lesbians and bisexual women across Britain – found high levels of poor resourcing in areas such as mental health, and poor access and uptake of cervical screening. Since we published that research we have worked closely with the NHS and health agencies to raise awareness of lesbian and bisexual women's health, but there is still more work to do.

WHAT ARE YOUR MOST EXCITING PLANS AND BIGGEST HOPES FOR THE FUTURE?

We're really excited and inspired by the progress that our Health Champions have made. In 2014 we'll be working with 20 new NHS organisations in England, and it's always good to see the positive changes they make through the Health Champions Programme.

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO SAY TO JOURNAL READERS?

We want to assure you that everyone can make a positive difference to the experience LGB people have when they're interacting with health services. Even simple steps – such as making sure that staff don't assume that when a patient says 'partner' they mean someone of the opposite sex – play a role.

HOW CAN JOURNAL READERS AND THEIR CLIENTS CONTACT YOU?

Stonewall's free Info Line (details below) is open during office hours Monday to Friday.

You can find out more about the Healthy Lives Programme from the website (<http://www.healthyvives.stonewall.org.uk>) where you can find advice and guidance for staff, patients and organisations, together with research into health inequalities experienced by LGB people and best practice and case studies from across the NHS.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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Editor's note This article is one in a series of occasional articles on key health organisations worldwide. The Journal would be pleased to hear from other organisations, particularly those based outside the UK, that would like to be similarly profiled.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters to the Editor are welcome and generally should not exceed 600 words or cite more than five references. For comments on material published in the most recent issue of the Journal, correspondence should be received within 4 weeks of dispatch of that Journal to be in time for inclusion in the next issue. When submitting letters correspondents should include their job title(s) and their work affiliation(s)/contact address(es). A statement on competing interests should also be submitted for all letters. Letters may be submitted to the Journal Editor or to the Journal Editorial Office (details on the Editorial Board page).