Can You See Us?

Experiences of LGBT Carers in England

Gaddum

LGBT foundation

LGBT foundation

We are LGBT Foundation. We believe in a fair and equal society where all lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people can achieve their full potential.

Our work started in 1975 and we've been changing the lives of LGBT people ever since. Over the last five decades, we've provided information, services and support for LGBT people who've had nowhere else to turn. We've been at the forefront of the social and legal changes that mean LGBT people in the UK have more rights than ever before.

Our work is as vital and urgent as ever. LGBT people still face persecution, discrimination and stark health inequalities. Through our services we reduce isolation amongst our communities, help people feel more confident and in control of their lives, and enable people to flourish.

Every year we serve 40,000 people - amplifying people's voices, providing support and offering hope. We work in partnership with others to build strong, cohesive and influential LGBT communities and promote attitude change in society, reaching 600,000 people online each year.

Together, we can secure a safe, healthy and equal future for all LGBT people.

Until then, we're here if you need us.

Gaddum

Gaddum is one of Manchester's oldest charities. Set up in 1833, its vision is to support Greater Manchester's most vulnerable adults, children and families.

At Gaddum, everyone is treated as an individual; understanding their world to offer a range of support that's right for them. Our promise of tailored support is made possible by our breadth and depth of knowledge, through our unwavering commitment to the local people of Greater Manchester.

Gaddum works across Greater Manchester and delivers services in Manchester, Rochdale, Salford and Stockport for:

- Advocacy
- Carers
- Therapy

As a provider for making lives better, our work includes counselling, advocacy, advice, family and individual support along with training and development programmes for individuals, families, agencies, local and health authorities, professionals and companies.

To find our more information, refer a person or family to one of our services, please visit www.gaddum.org.uk

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Acknowledgements

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Introduction

At the start of the project we researched what already existed in terms of LGBT+ carers support and found that little work had been done to understand the experiences LGBT+ carers and to address their specific needs.

The evidence that does exist suggests that LGBT+ carers face a range of barriers and that their needs are often not met by services. For example, a Brighton and Hove LGBT Switchboard carer's consultation found that LGBT+ carers faced a number of issues related to their identity. There were concerns that respite care would 'not be LGBT aware and respectful' and participants were concerned that care provided in the home would not be appropriate and may not respect their dignity and wishes. It was felt that support, advice and services must be LGBT+ aware and able to respond to the concerns that carers have.[1]

A 2011 Stonewall survey found that three in five older LGB people were not confident that social care and support services, like paid carers or housing services, would be able to understand and meet their needs.[2]

Furthermore 2015 research found a lack of recognition of LGBT relationships, this can be of friends as well as partners, this can create conflict over who is in charge of a persons' care and who is nominated to make decisions on behalf of someone.[3]

Young LGBT carers may also not be getting the support they need, a study of young LGBT carers in Scotland found that almost 2 in 3 said there was no person at their educational institution who recognised them as a LGBT young carer and helped them.[4]

In order to address this gap in the evidence LGBT Foundation and Gaddum launched a project to better understand LGBT+ carer's needs and to look at how services should be improved to better support LGBT+ carers, this involved the recruitment of an advisory panel of LGBT+ cares from across the UK, who acted as the 'experts by experience' for the project and also they decided on the content and questions of the survey before it was released, as well as reviewing the results and deciding on what they final report should look like.The survey ran January-February 2021 and collected 74 responses.

Many thanks to the LGBT+ Carers Co-production group for contributing towards the design of this survey.

Key Findings

The respondents were asked 'thinking about you own needs, what is most important to you as a carer?' and were able to say whether something was 'very important', 'important' 'neither important nor unimportant', 'not particularly important' or 'very unimportant'.

Mental wellbeing was overall the most important, with 70% of respondents saying that it was very important and a further 23% saying it was important. Additionally, most of the other options given were felt to be important by the majority of respondents:

- 59% of respondents felt that feeling financially stable was very important and a further 33% felt it was important.
- 49% of respondents felt that physical health was very important and a further 41% felt it was important.
- 45% of respondents felt that having someone trusted to talk to was very important and a further 39% felt it was important.
- 34% of respondents felt that being in contact with others in LGBT communities was very important and a further 35% felt it was important.
- 31% of respondents felt that respite was very important and a further 36% felt it was important.
- 30% of respondents felt that socialising with friends/ family was very important and a further 47% felt it was important.
- 26% of respondents felt that employment was very important and a further 46% felt it was important.
- 26% of respondents felt that professional support was very important and a further 42% felt it was important.

This demonstrates that, unsurprisingly, carers feel that a wide range of factors are important to them. This means that carers support services should seek to be as holistic as they can be. Additionally, they should be able to effectively signpost to services that can support carers in areas that they are not be able to provide support around.

47% had accessed support services that provided help around their needs as a carer. 53% had not accessed this kind of support.

Of those who had accessed carers support services:

- 30% strongly agreed the service(s) they accessed met their needs.
- 43% agreed.
- 10% neither agreed or disagreed.
- 10% disagreed.
- 7% strongly disagreed.

Of those who disagreed, some explained why the services had not met their needs:

> *"Although they provided me with a small "wellbeing" payment and wrote up a Carer's Plan, I still feel completely alone and unsupported. They also assumed I was straight."*

> *"They were mostly older people who had no idea how to deal with the situation they found themselves in. We had nothing in common and I did not feel like I belonged there."*

> *"Fight for everything, not easy to navigate and the service will do anything to keep costs down and give minimum support based on costing"*

> *"Changes ahead have been brilliant but are underresourced. Mhrrs [Mental health Rapid Response Service] very difficult to get realistic support. Signposting is in place but drop off unless cared for is in crisis"*

Of those who had accessed carers support services:

- 55% said that work commitments were a barrier to accessing services.
- 41% said that their mental wellbeing was a barrier.
- 38% said that awareness of support services available was a barrier.
- 34% said that their caring responsibilities were a barrier.
- 21% said that thinking that the service would not meet their needs as an LGBT person was a barrier.

Those who had accessed carers support services were asked what would help them overcome barriers to accessing services:

- 47% said having services that better understands the needs of the person they are caring for.
- 43% said support that better understands their needs as an LGBT person.
- 40% said being able to talk to other carers who would understand the difficulties they have faced.
- 40% said having services that listen to them and respect that they are an expert in both their own needs and the needs of the person they are caring for.

Those who had accessed carers support services were asked what would help them overcome barriers to accessing services:

- 53% said awareness of support services available.
- 50% said they don't need support.
- 22% said their caring responsibilities were a barrier.
- 22% said work commitments were a barrier.
- 17% said their mental wellbeing was a barrier.
- 17% said they thought services would not respond to their needs as an LGBT person.
- 17% said they were worried about facing discrimination based on their LGBT identity.

Those who had not access support were asked what would help them to overcome barriers to accessing support:

- 38% said being able to talk to other carers who could give them advice about accessing services.
- 34% said having services that listen to them and respect that they are an expert in both their own needs and the needs of the person they are caring for.
- 28% said having services that better met their needs.
- 25% said having support that better understands their needs as an LGBT person and a carer.
- 22% said having services that better understood the needs of the person they are caring for.
- 22% said being able to access advocacy services (services that help to ensure individuals get the support they deserve and ensure their rights are being upheld).

There was a fairly high demand for support among all respondents:

- 58% would like to access mental health support such as counselling.
- 45% would like to access an LGBT peer support group.
- 42% would like to access a peer support group for LGBT carers.
- 37% would like support and advice online.
- 33% would like to get some advice on what support they are eligible to access and how they can access this.
- 27% would like to access a carers advocacy service.

Encouragingly most respondents were confident to access face-to-face support when it is safe to do so. 58% felt either extremely or very confident, 34% felt somewhat confident and 8% said they felt not so confident.

25% said they would prefer online support, 23% would prefer face-to-face support, 5% would prefer phone support and 48% would like a mixture of all three.

67% think that support services need to take steps to become more LGBT friendly.

People explained why they felt support services need to do more to be more LGBT friendly:

> *"It's awkward when I have to explain who my partner is."*

> *"It's often assumed my slightly older partner is my father and sometimes it seems easier to let this go rather than explain!"*

> *"Stop with the assumption of heteronormative families and relationships. More awareness of carers who are stuck in the closet because of their caring responsibilities towards homophobic dependants."*

> *"I myself am under the CMHT [Community Mental Health Team] and my sexuality isn't recognised in my care plan, it's just left blank even though I have spoken about my sexual identity with service providers."*

> *"[Support services need better] understanding and explicit acknowledgement that caring for family is not the only kind of care there is and more LGBT people are more likely to be caring for 'found family' of all kinds, and are more likely to be carers at a younger age of others who are also younger."*

> *"[Support services need] more awareness and signposting, having LGBT champions in their services - so there was a point of contact who understood the community and topics we might wish to discuss."*

This final question asked respondents if there was anything else that they thought would make them feel better supported as an LGBT carer. Some of these responses were around a need for more LGBT-specific carers support and visibility:

> *"More support groups targeted at LGBT."*

> *"LGBT respite space that would feel safe to me and/or my partner."*

> *"Maybe to just feel listened to more and an LGBT person to talk to."*

> *"Mostly I feel needs are professionally assessed and being LGBT is not an issue although personally it does feel as if we're retreating into our own closets - perhaps LGBT specific support is important for our mental wellbeing."*

> *"Social events with other lgbt carers."*

> *"Never felt as a Carer that the LGBT were even aware of people being Carers. Highlight that there is a service for them and highlight that there is support for carers throughout the Carers Community."*

> *"Greater focus on and visibility of carers issues within the LGBT community."*

There were a number of other comments that bought up a range of issues:

> *"Professionals are helpful, and usually already aware of me / my partner as lesbian. I do however feel that their support services make many assumptions about age/mental health etc about "carers" and find I rarely fit into that. For example, I don't need help with finances, and I haven't felt advertised group events would be useful for me, that is not worth taking the time away from home. I can already access Hospice advice/services, such as massage, which is very helpful."*

“Just being kept up to date and in touch, I may not always be able to access support that is available or attend groups that are running but I do really appreciate the information and ongoing contact and I do want to be able to contribute whenever I feel able to.”

“Advocacy for me when I need to challenge decisions and I don’t have the confidence to do it.”

“Better care for mental health and also support with my religious beliefs.”

Demographics

Who respondents care for:

- 51.4% partner
- 10.8% friend
- 32.4% parent
- 4.1% their child (under 18)
- 2.7% their child (over 18)
- 5.4% sibling
- 9.5% other (3 people grandparent, 1 stepdaughter, 1 person daughter and grandson)

Location:

- 40.4% lived in Greater Manchester
- 10.5% lived in the North West, but outside of Greater Manchester
- 1.8% lived in the North East
- 1.8% lived in Yorkshire and the Humber
- 1.8% lived in the East Midlands
- 3.5% lived in the West Midlands
- 15.8% lived in the East of England
- 3.5% lived in London
- 8.8% lived in the South East
- 10.5% lived in the South West
- 1.8% lived in Scotland

Sexual Orientation:

- 20.7% lesbian
- 12.1% bisexual
- 44.8% gay
- 8.6% heterosexual/ straight
- 13.8% in other way (1 person polysexual, 3 people queer, 1 person demisexual, 1 person asexual, 1 person queer/pansexual)

Gender:

- 47.3% male
- 31.6% female
- 10.6% non-binary
- 10.5% in another way (1 person gender-fluid, 1 person agenda, 1 questioning, 1 genderqueer, 1 person not sure)

Trans status:

- 79.3% had the same gender identity as the gender they were given at birth
- 20.7% had a different gender identity as the gender they were given at birth

Ethnicity:

- 80.7% White British
- 3.5% White Irish
- 7% other White background
- 1.8% Black or Black British African
- 1.8% mixed White and Black Caribbean
- 1.8% mixed White and Black African
- 1.8% other mixed background
- 1.8% Asian or Asian British background

Disability:

- 48.3% were disabled
- 51.7% were not disabled

Ethnicity:

- 50% full time employed
- 10.3% part time employed
- 12.1% full time student
- 1.7% part time student
- 17.2% unemployed (eligible benefits)
- 3.5% unemployed (ineligible benefits)
- 5.2% part time self-employed
- 5.2% retired

Further information and support

Gaddum website: www.gaddum.org.uk

LGBT Foundation website: www.lgbt.foundation

Caring for LGBTQ+ People at the End of Life
This booklet explains the care and support that is available for people living with a terminal illness. It provides information about how you can plan ahead for your care and your practical needs:
https://www.mariecurie.org.uk/professionals/palliative-care-knowledge-zone/equality-diversity/lgbt-end-life

Carers Trust- No longer Able to Care
These resources highlight how older parent carers and ageing carers who face additional barriers to accessing services should be supported to prepare for a time when they are less able or unable to provide care. This includes specific information around older LGBT carers:
https://carers.org/resources/all-resources/105-no-longer-able-to-care

LGBTQ & Caring
This guide explores the experiences of LGBTQ+ carers and outlines what support is available:
http://www.carersuk.org/files/section/5677/cuk-lgbtq-booklet-wales-final.pdf

Hidden Figures: LGBT Health Inequalities in the UK:
www.lgbt.foundation/hiddenfigures

Hidden Figures: The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on LGBT Communities:
www.lgbt.foundation/coronavirus/hiddenfigures

For more information on LGBT training offered by LGBT Foundation:
www.lgbt.foundation/trainingacademy

References

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Achieving Equality

Encouraging Wellbeing

Promoting Safety

We believe in a fair and equal society where all lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people can achieve their full potential.

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LGBT foundation

Gaddum

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Supporting those who support others.

Unwaged carers are often looking after someone simply because they care, and this can be tough. Being a carer can be stressful with very little me time. I give help and support to those people helping and supporting others.

If you would like to know more about this project or about Gaddum please do get in touch.

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'Yours, Gaddum'

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