

# The Manchester Lesbian Community Project



Annual Report  
2007-2008

...because community is important  
to lesbians!

## History of the Project

In 1997 Manchester City Council undertook a review of voluntary sector services for lesbians and gay men. The review highlighted significant gaps in the service provision for lesbians, and showed a need for more women-only spaces, groups and support. The project was initially set up under Manchester City Council's Community Health and Resources (CHRC)

- 1998 Post of Lesbian Participation Worker established  
First Newsletter published, new lesbian groups set up
- 1999 Part time administration post established
- 2000 Project became independent of CHRC
- 2001 Project moved from to Sidney Street
- 2002 Development worker post established
- 2003 The Manchester Lesbian Community Project became a registered charity (1098158) and company limited by guarantee (4657590)
- 2004 Post of Development worker filled, consultation of 200 women at pride.
- 2005 Staffing restructure took place and the posts of coordinator and Development worker were reorganised. A joint administration worker with peer support was employed.
- 2006 New board of trustees came into post, A full time Administration and Finance worker came into post.
- 2007 Due to funding cuts the posts of Administration and Finance worker and Development Worker ended.  
The future of Sidney Street as an office and community space for the LCP came under question.  
Volunteer training programme and supervision set up.
- 2008 Florence and Michael are granted leave to remain in the UK. Newsletter re-launched as Zhoosh magazine.  
The LCP runs workshops for women at the LGF Sugar & Spice Conference. Engage project launched.

The Manchester Lesbian Community Project's work is still concentrated in developing groups and networks, and facilitating the dissemination of information. This work continues to be prioritised around Older Lesbians, Black and Asian Lesbians, Disabled Lesbians and Lesbians with Children.

## Chair's Report 2007-2008

2007-2008 firmly marks the LCP, its staff and volunteers as campaigners in the face of adversity.

In the co-ordinator's report Lisa talks about the changing landscape of funding and grants in the UK in the voluntary sector.

It has become increasingly difficult to secure funding for much needed salaried positions as a stand alone project. Now more than ever LGBT groups need to work together, not against, afraid or in competition of each other.

We are pleased to be working with the LGF, and were delighted to support the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sugar & Spice conference which was a resounding success. We also have a strong relationship with [www.canal-st.co.uk](http://www.canal-st.co.uk) fast becoming a one stop information point for the LGBT community in Manchester.

The LCP brand and voice is important, but working with other groups will ensure our continued success and enable us to reach a wider audience.

Last year saw uncertainty around the future of the Lesbian and Gay Centre in Sidney Street. However what has emerged from this is a stronger voice of the groups who use the Sidney Street centre and a consultation process introduced by the council who own the premises to ensure the centre can work better for the community groups who access it.

We also said goodbye to Jo, Chair of Trustees and Janet the Trustee who helped shape and develop our volunteers in October of last year due to personal commitments. Both have helped make the LCP what it is today, Jo's determination and leadership provided a stable backdrop for the LCP throughout much of 2007. Janet was respected by volunteers, her passion for volunteer development evident in the time she spent overhauling policies and procedures, developing a code of conduct and being around to listen to ideas.

It is easy to lose sight of our successes, but we are particularly proud of the Florence and Michael Campaign, supporting the OWL's group and Women's Space and the launch of Zhoosh magazine- at last an alternative to DIVA... and it's free!

### **The LCP of the future**

It is clear that there are more challenges ahead for the LCP, the project has continually developed and moulded itself to the needs of the Lesbian and Bisexual community. "The ability to change and respond to the diverse community is our key strength".

Leila Wilson - Chair of Trustees November 2007-April 2008

## **Operating on a single grant from Manchester City Council, the board put a strategic plan in place with the following objectives for 2007-2008**

### **Deliver high impact events**

LCP to have a strong brand and voice in the community

Outcomes:

A new LCP logo was introduced

The brand "...because community is important to lesbians" was developed

The LCP supported a number of high impact events, including Women's Space 2007 and Florence and Michael Campaign fundraisers

The LCP had a presence at Manchester and Oldham Prides

### **Communicate with service users**

Continue to provide a paper based newsletter to those who want it, but explore other media and improve content to reach a wider audience, and to conduct a consultation on the services women wanted

Outcomes:

A consultation of women took place at the Manchester pride EXPO- results on the next page

Zhoosh magazine was launched to replace the Newsletter, the e-bulletin continues to be sent out to our mailing lists and the LCP website has been regularly updated since January 2008

### **Develop our staff and volunteers**

Review policies and set up provision for induction and continuing development of skills

Outcomes:

During 2007 training and development for staff and volunteers was reviewed. Key policies such as Health and Safety, Discipline, Grievance required by law were updated.

### **Support Existing groups**

Providing a safe and accessible place for groups to meet

Outcomes:

The Sidney Street Centre consultation has been represented by the LCP board, discussions around facilities and updating facilities are ongoing

Following a health and safety session, volunteers carried out a risk assessment identifying areas for improvement at the centre.

The LCP continued to support the Florence and Michael campaign, OWL's and Women's Space.

A new project 'Engage' was launched, primarily an arts project to engage service users is has also provided valuable evidence to support lesbian services in the North West.

## **Manchester Pride and EXPO consultation**

### **Key findings**

A profile of the women stated they currently use the Lesbian Community project services (Drop-In, Discussion Group, OWL's, Newsletter, E-Bulletin & Website)

- 25 years +
- Have children
- Experienced or experiencing mental health issues
- Low Confidence/Low Self Esteem

In the paper 'Our Shared Future' the Commission on Community and Cohesion suggested:

'Developing a strategy for encouraging and supporting initiatives that are making or can make significant bridges between different communities'

We are attracting women from most Manchester post codes to Drop In and Discussion groups; however we do not attract women from the M22 and M40 post codes, understanding the barriers preventing women using the LCP services is a key challenge for us in 2008-2009.

### **What women want!**

We took 20 responses from each age range to look at trends

- 25-30 age group want alcohol free zones to meet and socialise with other women
- 31-40 age group want healthy food options at events
- 41-50 want LGBT information and libraries
- 51-60+ want weekend social events

What about the under 25's? there was an interesting trend and omission on services for under 25's completing the consultation, we could assume that under 25's are catered for by youth LGBT groups, and Village social events.

### **Conclusion**

The consultation validated the work the LCP currently undertakes, from the launch of a LGBT library last year, to healthy option drop in evenings; it also inspired us to launch Engage- a project that looks at life journeys.

## **Co-ordinator's Report March 2007 – February 2008**

As any of us who work in the voluntary sector will be aware, our position is often in a state of flux, influenced by external conditions such as the current social and economic climate. This manifests itself in terms of, for example, funders' changing priorities; changes from grant funding to commissioning; and the impact of legislative changes on how the 'needs' of our community are perceived. My report this time last year stated that for the first time in several years we were enjoying the luxury of having 3 members of staff, but those 'external influences' have once again played their part and we now find ourselves without an administration worker or development worker.

In May and July respectively last year we regrettably had to say goodbye to Naomh, our Development Worker and Lyndsey, our Administration and Information Worker as our Comic Relief funding came to an end. Despite concerted efforts to seek funding from elsewhere, we were unsuccessful. It is with thanks to Manchester City Council's ongoing financial support that we have been able to continue.

We are aware that it is a very competitive market out there for organisations seeking grant funding and lesbian and bisexual women are not always top of the priority list for some funders. This is where the external forces come into play in terms of how the needs of our community are sometimes perceived. Recent years have seen positive legislative changes for the LGBT community such as the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations of 2003, the Civil Partnerships Act in 2005 and the Sexual Orientation Regulations of 2007. This, coupled with the work of LGBT organisations to combat homophobia, may lead some to believe that lesbian and bisexual women's rights have been all but won. The every day reality of our work at the Lesbian Community Project tells us that is far from the case.

The women we work with come to our Project for a broad range of reasons, not least because (they tell us) they appreciate the sense of community and sense of belonging that comes with being in a lesbian/bisexual women only environment. We provide a safe space where women from all backgrounds and of all ages can come together to socialise, share experiences, learn from each other and access the support services that are on offer. Over the past year, we have responded to 9,085 e-mails and telephone calls, many of these being from individuals asking for information, support, signposting and sometimes, simply a listening ear. Experience tells us that despite legislative changes, lesbian and bisexual women are still experiencing homophobic abuse; isolation because of fear of 'coming out'; pressure to conform to heterosexual stereotypes; physical and verbal abuse because of our sexuality; domestic violence; bullying in schools and in the work place; rejection by family members; assumptions about our sexuality in accessing health care etc etc etc. Furthermore, many of the women we work with experience multiple oppressions based not only on their gender and sexuality but also their ethnic

origin, disability or age. The negative impact all this has on the physical and mental health of lesbian and bisexual women cannot be overestimated. We are therefore proud that, despite cut backs in funding and staffing, we have continued to provide a vital service to support the lesbian and bisexual women of Manchester (and beyond). This has been made possible by the hard work, commitment and dedication of a team of volunteers who have worked alongside myself and our Board of Trustees to ensure that cuts in funding have not lead to cuts in service delivery. Below are some of the outputs we have achieved this year:

**March 2007 – February 2008**

<b>Groups run by/supported by the LCP</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Number of service users</b>	<b>1,574</b>
<b>E-mails/telephone calls responded to</b>	<b>9,085</b>
<b>Website hits</b>	<b>63184</b>
<b>Volunteers worked with</b>	<b>12</b>

Other achievements include:

- The success of the Florence and Michael Campaign, giving Florence and Michael indefinite leave to remain in the UK
- One of the most successful ever Women's Space events supported by the LCP
- The Drop-in celebrating its 3<sup>rd</sup> Birthday
- Highly successful fundraising events for Women's Space and Florence and Michael's Campaign
- Launch of the new, revamped newsletter
- Successful funding bid to Awards For All for our volunteering project
- The OWLs Group celebrating its 1st Birthday

I would like to say a personal thank you to all the volunteers who have supported the work of the LCP over the past year. We couldn't have continued to deliver the same level of service without the knowledge, skills and experience that each of our volunteers brings to the project. They have each contributed in their own unique way and as the only paid member of staff, I am grateful to each and everyone for their support and commitment.

Our focus for the coming year will be to build on recent successes; to secure further funding for staff salaries; and to seek creative ways of achieving sustainability for the project. We wish to encourage individual input and feedback to ensure that we are meeting the diversity of need that we know exists within the lesbian and bisexual women's community. We would like to thank everyone who has supported the LCP over the past year in whatever capacity and we look forward to working with you in the coming year as we continue to face the many challenges that still lie ahead of us.

# Thank You

The Lesbian Community Project would like to say a big thank you to:

## Volunteers

Amber Stevens, Sheila Carson, Barbara Proctor, Karen McCarthy, Florence Moses, Phaedra McHale, Elaine Vaughan, Julie Voisey, Joanne Scholes, Marion Girling, Karen Julia, Gemma Nash, Paul Gibbons.

## Organisations

Manchester City Council- Our key funder  
Manchester Pride  
Awards for All  
Community Fund  
The Lesbian and Gay Foundation  
Canal-st.co.uk  
Age Concern Manchester and Salford  
Chorlton Irish Club  
Manchester Metropolitan University  
Taurus Bar  
LIK:T  
LGYM

## Who are we?

Lisa Buklovskis	Co-ordinator
Lyndsey Girling	Information, Administration and Finance officer to July '07
Naomh McKee	Development Worker to May '07

## Board of Trustees

Jo Monkton Chair/Secretary	Resigned October 2007
Rosie Garland	Board Member
Janet Marrs	Resigned October 2007
Moira Cleneghan	Board Member
Leila Wilson Chair/Secretary	November '07 to April '08
Tish Harrower	Board Member
Aleesha Coupland	Board Member and Treasurer

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