

## **Response of the Supported Loving Cymru LGBTQ Group to the Welsh Government's LGBTQ+ Action Plan.**

Supported Loving Cymru is a network of organizations that support LGBTQ+ people with a learning disability and individuals.

The function of this group is to better understand and challenge the dominant narrative within society that deny adults with a learning disability access to any sexual identity or expression. As part of this work, the group is looking to understand the culture within social care that potentially prioritises safeguarding at the expense of individual human rights.

In 2021 the group was merged with the Supported loving Cymru network to ensure access to professionals, staff and of course people with a learning disability.

Our response is a collection of reflections from a series of conversations the group had about the LGBTQ+ action plan.

### **Discussion**

The group supports the overarching aims and actions within the plan, however, the needs of LGBTQ+ learning disabled people would be better served by a social care specific action. Whilst there is a cross-over between health and social care, the influence social care has on the lives of people with a learning disability cannot be understated.

Whilst we welcome the additional training for social care staff, the issues faced by LGBTQ+ people with a learning disability, their family/carers and support staff will require a more targeted focus on our sector.

### **Rights**

We support wholeheartedly the inclusion of transgender individuals within the plan. The learning-disabled community has historically faced stigma and discrimination from society, institutions and individuals within them. The fight for equality for people with a learning disability and trans people is the strongly linked and we stand in solidarity with the transgender community.

Whilst the plan covers the intersection of LGBTQ+ with several protected characteristics we feel that the link to disability and particular learning disability requires further exploration.

The learning disability sector faces challenges when supporting heteronormative relationships, let alone LGBTQ+ relationships. These challenges are due to a lack of support for staff and parent/carers, the prevailing view that people with a learning disability will never progress past an adolescent relationship and a lack of power and agency to make decisions relating to relationships and intimacy. A person with a learning disability will face these barriers, in addition to the stigma, negative perceptions and discrimination faced with being LGBTQ+.

Therefore LGBTQ+ people must have the right to access information and advice in a format suitable to their needs. Welsh Government must provide funds for all information to be available in easy-read and easy-read Welsh as well as reaching out to people to make sure they receive this material.

Information is important but so is the ability to discuss, explore and share experiences. Welsh Government must allow LGBTQ+ people the right to self-discovery through adequate services, a well-prepared workforce and supportive and knowledgeable family/carers.

### **Workforce Development**

Training can be useful, but amongst a stretched workforce we feel that merely providing LGBTQ+ training to social care staff will not be enough. The sector often acts reactively, treating LGBTQ+ issues as 'problems' that need addressing from a safeguarding perspective. This ignores the disabled person's rights to receive correct information and to have space for discovery and decide how they want to live their lives.

Care staff will only be able to explore their thinking around LGBTQ+ issues by having space for conversations, supported by adequate organisational policy. Social care staff are often hesitant to support LGBTQ+ individuals, or more generally around sex and relationships because they fear getting in trouble. The policies that organisations have are often more about protecting individuals' staff from harm or liability. This needs to change.

Welsh Government must ensure that all care providers have affirmative sex, sexuality and relationships policies and a specific LGBTQ+ policy. To make sure care providers act this must become a mandatory reporting requirement for Care Inspectorate Wales reports.

Social care staff must feel empowered to support LGBTQ+ people with a learning disability, not pushed to deny rights out of a desire to protect.

### **Power/Autonomy**

A person with a learning disability will often have a wide circle of support around them. As a result, they may lack autonomy or power over decisions that affect them. This has never been truer than it is around LGBTQ+ and connected issues; sex, sexuality and relationships.

Families, alongside staff, often carry the bulk of the support around a person's emotional and social wellbeing. But in seeking to care, support, and protect many of us focus on the learning disability, not the whole person.

So when a learning disabled person who is also LGBTQ+ needs support, a whole new set of fears, bias and insecurities arise. Family/carers and support staff are often painted as the problem, but often all they require is appropriate support, advice and information. When given the right support themselves, they can begin to devolve the unspoken power and influence they hold.

Welsh Government must work to not only increase knowledge of people's rights as an LGBTQ+ person but actively promote the expression of these rights by giving people who support people with a learning disability the right support.

### **Language/Information**

For LGBTQ+ people with a learning disability to be fully informed, all information must be made accessible/easy read in English and Welsh. Welsh Government must provide additional funding to ensure any learning disabled LGBTQ+ person, and their circle of support can access information in a format suitable to them.

Policies and language are often gendered, making trans and non-binary people with learning disabilities feel even more excluded. Welsh Government must ensure social care becomes more inclusive in this regard.

Some of our members expressed the view that the term "LGBTQ+" is not accessible for people with a learning disability. Acronyms especially can exclude those without an understanding of what they mean. This sometimes leads to discomfort out of fear of getting the terminology wrong. Education will be key in communicating what LGBTQ+ means. We could not agree on a suitable and easy alternative, highlighting how difficult an issue labelling and language can be. One idea was to say "The Pride Community".

### **Other**

Many of our members have been involved in training Doctors and other clinicians but this has been on an ad-hoc basis, and often in a derisory timeframe, with the social model of disability and other minority issues treated as something outside their formal education.

Whilst we have been skeptical of the role of training within social care to address these issues, we strongly feel that within the more formalised, academic training provided to NHS clinicians and support staff, mandatory training is required. This will help to address how future clinicians support the next generation of LGBTQ+ people with and without a learning disability.

Welsh Government must make the teaching of LGBTQ+ and intersectionality a mandatory.

Finally, we want to highlight an issue with Question 8 of the 'regular' response form:

*"Please also explain how you believe the proposed policy approach could be formulated or changed so as to have positive effects or increased positive effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language, and no adverse effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language."*

Whilst we appreciate the creation of separate easy-read response document, and that they exist because by necessity Government documents often employ unwieldy phrasing to accommodate legalese, the above question defies understanding.

### **Finally**

We, the Supported Loving LGBTQ+ Group call on Welsh Government to create an LGBTQ+ social care task force to address the very specific needs outlined in our response. We also would like to emphasize the Importance of talking to LGBTQ+ people with learning disabilities directly in order to find out what forms of support would be most useful to hem.