

MESMAG Winter 2008/09

More Gay Men than Ever Before Living with HIV in the UK

Over 3,000 men who have sex with men were diagnosed with HIV last year in the UK.

The Health Protection Agency now estimates that there are 32,000 gay and bisexual men living with HIV in the UK. One in four of men living with HIV in the UK, aged between 15-49 do not know that they have HIV.

Tom Doyle, Director of Yorkshire MESMAC, commenting on the figures said, 'The fact that a quarter of gay and bisexual men with HIV do not know that they have it is worrying on a number of levels. First and most important is that we know that the sooner men get their HIV diagnosed the better it is for their physical health, for example there are more treatment options open to them.'

'A further concern is that men may be negotiating sex with their partners without all the facts and so may be unaware of the potential dangers.'

'We want to make it as easy as possible for men to get an HIV test that is why we run a community HIV testing service which is free, fast and flexible.'

You can either come along to the Thursday night session between 6pm and 7.30pm or you can call 0113 2444209 to make an appointment that suits you.

Once you have had your pre-test discussion with our trained staff we can give you your result within half an hour.

For more information about HIV tests in Yorkshire visit Yorkshire MESMAC's website www.mesmac.co.uk

Our Project Update

During the months of November and December, the OUR project has been busy spreading awareness of World AIDS Day (W.A.D.). We have organised various events, starting with a community action day in the centre of Bradford, where we worked alongside The British Red Cross, Bradford PCT, the Equity Centre and The Global Exchange Volunteers, raising awareness of HIV and AIDS, handing out facts, information, condoms, femidoms, and dental dams direct to the people of Bradford.

We also held a football tournament with cash prizes which was attended by local African football teams and their supporters; this was a great day followed by a BBQ at the

Merry Mason pub. This was a good opportunity to promote the OUR service to African men.

The Rafter's played host to a night of frolicking fun with local drag queens Princess Annabelle, Miss Missy Mincin' and many others; staff from OUR attended to raise funds, awareness, and promote the OUR project and Yorkshire MESMAC group of services.

At the Equity Centre a small group met on W.A.D. where prayers were said and the OUR staff spoke about stigma and discrimination that still faces positive people and the roles that everyone and anyone can play at tackling these issues.

The Westleigh Hotel held a karaoke and raffle night and again, OUR staff were there with their collection tins and answering any questions around HIV and advising on services on offer from OUR and Yorkshire MESMAC.

Hanson Secondary School collected cash for W.A.D. This was collected by the six form students after they attended HIV training.

The OUR project are now offering pre testing support and follow up support too; outreach work will start in the next following weeks, this will take place at the Trinity Centre on HIV clinic days.

The OUR project is currently seeking to rent an allotment to offer an opportunity to its service users to grow vegetables and flowers; hopefully we can update you on this in the next issue.

Over the next few weeks 6 training sessions are booked, delivering HIV awareness and anti-stigma training to secondary schools throughout Bradford.

Begin Goes to Blackpool

A residential weekend was held in November 2008 for service users of Begin at the Savoy Hotel in Blackpool. 'An amazing and special time', was how one service user described the event which included: free accommodation and meals, free entry to the pleasure beach, free child care, a children's trip to the Sea Life Centre and plenty of opportunities to discuss Begin as is, and how we would like it to be. Tom Doyle, Director of Yorkshire MESMAC, also came and ran a session with service users to facilitate better communication between Begin service users and Yorkshire MESMAC.

The weekend enabled service users and staff to get their heads together and they came up with a number of great ideas to develop the service provided by Begin.

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New PEP Campaign Launched

Yorkshire MESMAC has launched a new campaign on PEP. The campaign is web based and also utilises our new 'matchbook' type condom & lube packs. Information leaflets and posters have been distributed both on the scene and our partnership agencies.

But what is PEP?

There is a course of drugs which may prevent HIV transmission after exposure called PEP (Post Exposure Prophylaxis). PEP must be taken ASAP after exposure to the virus and must be taken before 72 hours. The faster you start the course the more effective it is.

PEP stands for Post Exposure Prophylaxis.

Post – After

Exposure - A situation where HIV has a chance to get into someone's body.

Prophylaxis – A combination of drugs that may stop infection happening.

PEP is taken for 28 days and on occasion people do experience side effects. PEP should be available at sexual health clinics or A&E departments. PEP is not a cure for HIV. Condoms and lube used properly remain the most effective way of preventing HIV transmission during sex. For more information contact your local office or check out the website at www.mesmac.co.uk and follow the links to the PEP pages.

Steaming In

This popular outreach service for the Steam Complex Sauna users is back for 2009 providing a free and confidential Hepatitis B vaccination service and Chlamydia/Gonorrhoea urine screening. The next sessions will be on:

Saturday 7th February 2009 1-6pm, Saturday 21st February 2009 1-6pm and Saturday 7th March 2009 1-6pm

If you have any questions please call 0113 244 4209 or look on our website www.mesmac.co.uk for future updates of the Steam Complex sessions.

Testing Times and Scene Screen

Testing Times started again on 8th January 2009 and will continue to run weekly on Thursdays in Leeds. This service provides free and confidential fast HIV tests (results back in 15 minutes), Chlamydia/Gonorrhoea urine screening and Hepatitis B vaccinations.

On every Thursday at 6-8pm, Yorkshire MESMAC also goes out on the Gay scene and offers Chlamydia/Gonorrhoea urine screening and Hepatitis B vaccinations in a Gay scene venue. Our volunteers will be circulating around the venues to advise people where to access the service and also to signpost the Yorkshire MESMAC office if any service users wish to access HIV testing.

If you have any questions, a Yorkshire MESMAC staff member can meet up for a chat with you, or if you prefer, answer your questions on 0113 244 4209.

Confident Cruising

Do you want to sharpen your cruising skills and build your confidence? This free one day course will help develop the confidence and skills to approach the men you like, negotiate the sex you want and enable you to say when you don't want it.

Confident Cruising is for any gay or bisexual man who wants to sharpen their cruising skills both online and face to face. It will be running in Wakefield on the 31st January, **attendance is by booking only; you can do this online at www.gmfa.org.uk/national or call 020 7738 3712**

MESVAC is Coming to Wakefield

The hugely popular and successful MESVAC, which has been running in Leeds for the past two years, will be available in Wakefield in the coming weeks.

The service will be running from the New Union in Wakefield City Centre on a Friday evening, between 7-9pm. On offer will be Hepatitis B vaccinations along with Chlamydia and Gonorrhoea screening and people will be able to talk to a nurse on any sexual health issues and get information.

If you are interested in volunteering for MESVAC or any other Yorkshire MESMAC service please contact Ann Marie on 0113 2444209 or email a.maguire@mesmac.co.uk

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LGB Attitudes to Mental Health Study – Preliminary Findings

On World Mental Health Day on 10th October last year, the Mental Health & Well Being Project in Bradford launched a survey into the Attitudes of LGB people to their own and other LGB peoples' mental health issues.

Questionnaires were distributed to people on the scene and through various LGB groups. The deadline for return of the questionnaires was set for the 31st December, 2008. By the deadline, we received 203 returned valid questionnaires. Obviously the data will need to undergo analysis but it is useful to look at some of the preliminary findings from the work.

The following was the data collected for each agreeing or strongly agreeing with the following statements:

People who are mentally ill stand out in a crowd because of their behaviour	29%
LGB people are more vulnerable to having mental health problems	24%
I would not enter into a relationship with someone who had a history of mental health problems	15%
Building a hostel for mentally ill people in my street would lower the tone of the neighbourhood	22%
Most mentally ill people are prone to violent outbursts	16%
To enjoy good mental health it is important for LGB to be open about their sexual orientation	56%
LGB people are more likely to think about suicide than their heterosexual peers	21%
Social networking sites on the Internet have had a positive effect on LGB people's mental health	44%
Mental illness makes someone unpredictable, unreliable and hard work to be with	26%
Alcohol & Street Drugs plays a big part in affecting the mental health of LGB people	42%
Older LGB people experience mental health difficulties due to the "youth-beauty" culture of the gay scene	25%
Having many sexual partners is not good for long-term mental health of LGB people	31%
I would be happy to tell my GP/Mental Health professional that I am LGB	82%

It is envisaged that a full Report will be written in the next few weeks and this will be displayed on the Yorkshire MESMAC website. If you have any queries on this project or research please feel free to contact James Moore on j.moore@mesmac.co.uk or on 07806 756757

Schools Work in Wakefield

The Fruitbowl Project Youth Development Worker, Sally Kitson and Wakefield's Community Development Worker, Jeff Platts recently took part in Immersion days at two schools in West Yorkshire.

The students take part in workshops throughout the day on issues on sexual health, pregnancy and contraception, relationships and issues affecting young people who may be Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered or questioning their sexuality. It's a positive step forward to hold these workshops and the students seem to gain lots of knowledge and understanding from these days. Another date is already set for March at Outwood Grange in Wakefield.

Legs, Bums & Tums

Begin service users are to kick the New Year off to an energetic start with the arrival of an exercise class to be held every Friday at 11am.

Despite the name, the class will provide an all over body workout designed to burn fat, tone muscle and make you smile.

Mark Tyson, a qualified and experienced fitness instructor, will be dusting off his 80s lycra for the first class to be held on 23rd January.

All Welcome!

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Fiona Broadfoot Research and Development Worker

Sometime last year Yorkshire MESMAC was approached by Wakefield PCT to do a short scoping exercise into the gaps in provision/needs of young people involved in abuse through sexual exploitation and adults involved in the sex industry. I came into post late July. Through the work it became evident that young people are at risk of/involved in Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) in Wakefield but there is no specialist service to meet the needs of this client group.

I am pleased to say that I am continuing to develop work around CSE in Wakefield to work with partner agencies to fill the gaps in provision for this very vulnerable client group! So watch this space.....!

Cath Higgins Admin and Finance Worker

I have had a very warm welcome from the Yorkshire MESMAC team since starting full time in November 08. Having worked in variety of organisations I was initially struck by the way in which the staff team operate, like a well oiled machine.

I have been shown consideration whilst I have been learning my new role and have already been encouraged to undertake training. To work for an organisation that values personal development is a privilege, as far too often in the private and corporate sector the profit motive takes precedence. I feel very optimistic about the year ahead and hope that I can make a worthwhile contribution to the organisation.

Volunteering at Yorkshire MESMAC

Volunteering at Yorkshire MESMAC has never been so good!! With new opportunities for volunteering developing, being a Yorkshire MESMAC volunteer will be the new must have for the 2009 season!!

October 18th kicked it all off with the first Volunteer Induction Day. 17 new hopefuls attended the session and are now fully fledged volunteers busy donating their time and skills in a whole host of areas.

Out on the scene volunteers alongside staff, happily chat to punters in the city's pubs and saunas about getting tested for Chlamydia and Gonorrhoea, encouraging them to utilise our on scene testing service and to pop over for a prick with our Hepatitis B vaccination service.

Drag Idol 2008 in November would not have been the fab evening of fun and frolics at the Jongleurs venue in Leeds had we not engaged an army of Yorkshire MESMAC volunteers to run behind the scenes. No drag contestant was left feeling lonely, no judge went without a drink, and no punter was left unbadgered to buy votes. Over £3000 was raised in total for Leeds based HIV charities including Yorkshire MESMAC.

Leeds Switchboard continues to serve our LGB communities and is completely run and staffed by Yorkshire MESMAC volunteers. It operates Tuesday to Friday 7pm- 10pm.

Chomping at the bit, we have the all new Events and Fundraising volunteers who are eager to set up events throughout the year raising the profile of Yorkshire MESMAC services and some fundraising too! So watch this space!

Our next Volunteer Induction Day will take place on the evening of Tuesday 3rd February at 6pm at our Leeds Office.

For more information about volunteering please contact Ellen Hill (North Yorkshire) on 01904 620 400, e.hill@mesmac.co.uk or Ann Marie Maguire (West Yorkshire) on 0113 2444209, a.maguire@mesmac.co.uk

Leeds Pride 4 Equality

As winter wraps its cold fingers ever more firmly around us with its freezing grasp and the Christmas decorations are packed away its time to start thinking about summer, sunshine and Leeds Pride on the 2nd of August.

'Leeds Pride 4 Equality' takes 4, fore or even for as this years theme, allowing a huge range of scope for those taking part. The theme for each of the previous events has been crucial to the success, with many people taking part in the parade and in the Lower Briggate area. This years Leeds Pride promises to be bigger and better with a larger stage event to start the day in Millennium Square, supported by the Leeds City Council Events Team and a new media sponsor ensuring that the now centre piece Leeds Pride parade gets a rousing send off.

With extended street closure times in place at the Lower Briggate and the transfer of the community stalls outside Leeds Pride will have more of a community carnival feel, ensuring that everyone is included. As in previous years there will also be a number of events leading up to the main Pride day, these include a sing along musical at the Hyde Park Picture House, Leeds Pride Fun/Sports picnic in Hyde Park and other scene venue based nights.

Check the Leeds Pride website www.leedspride.com for more details nearer the time. See you on the 2nd of August.

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Developments in Scarborough; the Old, the Young and Everyone Else!

In recent years Scarborough has had few groups available for the LGBT community.

In 2008 that all changed. The **OLGA** group was formed in early 2008 by a dedicated group of **Older Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered people**. The group has been working tirelessly all year attending training, pride events and more. In December they held a Christmas party for Older LGBT people. For more information about this group please contact Mary Birch; 07505 607 388, olgascarborough@hotmail.com

In October Yorkshire MESMAC started two more 'groups' in Scarborough for LGBT communities. The LGBT forum follows the example set by York and is a place where all LGBT people of all ages can raise their issues and concerns. **The Scarborough and Ryedale LGBT forum** has met three or four times already and is growing steadily. Members are expressing their interests in change in Scarborough and deciding how to steer their forum to enable this change to happen – it could be a pride festival, a social group or any other number of developments watch this space.... Contact Ellen Hill for more details: 01904 620 400, e.hill@mesmac.co.uk

The **LGBT youth group** was started in Scarborough on the 15th October. This group; a safe space where young LGBTQ people access support around issues and socialise with their peers, is for all people under the age of 25 who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered or questioning their sexual orientation. The group has met fortnightly since then at a central location and been growing in numbers. We've been involved in allsorts of activities – Halloween and Christmas parties, games nights, talks about our aspirations, publicity discussions and in the New Year we plan much, much more. Contact Ellen Hill for more details. Call: 01904 620 400, call or text: 07899 016 239 or email e.hill@mesmac.co.uk

Switched On

Switch has started up again after a short December break to recover and the support group for Transsexual people (at all stages of transition) is back on Tuesday 27th January between 6-8pm. Switch meets up every last Tuesday of the month 6-8pm in the Yorkshire MESMAC meeting room and is run by Transsexual volunteers who warmly welcome new members.

Currently Switch is looking at organising some activities and a schedule of events so will welcome any suggestions. Get in contact with Switch by email switch@mesmac.co.uk or call 0113 244 4209 for directions or questions you may have.

'Older and Bolder'....is another year older!

2008 was an eventful year for 'Older and Bolder' the social support group for gay men over 60 and their partners/carers based in Bradford. The group is a partnership service and is delivered by Yorkshire MESMAC and The Equity Partnership on a fortnightly basis on Monday afternoons.

The group enjoyed a wealth of visits, trips and group activities in 2008 including; a residential to sunny Blackpool (and it was actually sunny!), a wild adventure in Knowsley Safari Park and a more peaceful trip on the Settle to Carlisle railway. The year ended with an Italian Christmas feast at Giuseppe's restaurant in Bradford where the group celebrated a year of fun and friendship.

Alongside social activities and excursions the group also benefits from speakers and staff from local agencies and organisations visiting the group and sharing information and resources. In 2008 the group members enjoyed visits from The Alzheimer's Society, The Bradford Men's Health Team and Yorkshire MESMAC's Mental Health and Well Being Workers. The agenda for 2009 is a work in progress as we try to cater to specific needs and requests but a pick 'n' mix of complimentary therapy sessions is already booked in so group members can enjoy Relaxation, Indian head massage, Reiki and Aromatherapy all in the next couple of months.

We are always keen to attract new faces to this lively, informal and fun social group so if you are a gay or bi or questioning man over 60 and think this group could be for you then don't hesitate to contact us! Contact j.cookson@mesmac.co.uk or ring Jonathan on **01274 395815** or contact the Equity Centre on: **01274 727759**

Positive Thinking

Just one of the developments to be discussed at Begin's Blackpool weekend and implemented already is the production of a monthly Newsletter 'Positive Thinking'.

**The first edition is available on the Begin website:
www.beginwakefield.co.uk**

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LGB Rugby League Supporters Group

The Rugby Football League recently announced that it will be holding a year long campaign to tackle homophobia within rugby league in 2009. Rugby league has had a tradition of being at the forefront of confronting discrimination issues within its sport and this latest campaign follows in that fine tradition. Working alongside this initiative, a group of LGB people are launching a group for LGB people interested or involved in rugby league – supporters, players, officials etc. The first meeting of the group will take place on Thursday 12th February at the Red Lion pub in Leeds from 8pm onwards. It is hoped that Sarah Williams, Equality & Diversity Manager for the Rugby Football League will be able to attend the meeting. If you are interested come along to the meeting on the 12th, or contact the group via j.moore@mesmac.co.uk for more information.

Wakey Wakey

Preparation is underway for a new activity group in Wakefield; the aim is to get people together to take part in fun activities and exercise and is aimed at all levels of fitness, ages and abilities. The activities will be fun and range from badminton, aerobics and circuit training to team games, aqua aerobics, strength training and core stability. Long term these activities can lead to many health benefits along with building confidence and self esteem. The groups will be free to join and will be run by two qualified fitness instructors who will also be offering weight management and nutritional and health information and help members build personal exercise programmes.

It doesn't matter if you've never taken part in any form of exercise before or not, we all start somewhere, **if you are interested please contact Jeff on 01924 211116 or email: j.platts@mesmac.co.uk**

Bradford & Airedale Mental Health/Well-being Support Group

A new group for lesbian, gay, bisexual people and is being launched at the Yorkshire MESMAC base in Bradford, on Tuesdays at 5 pm, for anyone in the Bradford and Airedale area who has any kind of mental health issues and who would like to experience the potential for mutual support within a group.

The precise content/activities of the group will be negotiated and decided upon by the group. The group will emphasise confidentiality, safety and positive health and well-being

Facilitated by a Yorkshire MESMAC mental health/well-being worker. Contact Clive on 07913 264967, email c.spendlove@mesmac.co.uk or James Moore on 07806 756757, email j.moore@mesmac.co.uk

New Social Group in Wakefield

A member of the Wakefield LGBT community has approached Yorkshire MESMAC for support in setting up a new social group.

The group will meet on a weekly basis and plan to do a number of social events ranging from cinema, theatre, going for a meal, quizzes, going for walks, days out etc. It will be a great opportunity to meet and catch up with friends and meet new people.

If you are interested and would like more information please contact **Jeff on 01924 211116 or email: j.platts@mesmac.co.uk**

C O N T A C T U S

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Tel: 0113 244 4209

Bradford

Tel: 01274 395 815

North Yorkshire Offices

Tel: 01904 620 400

Wakefield

Tel: 01924 211 116

BLAST Project

Tel: 0113 2444 209

OUR Project

Tel: 01274 740 548

Begin at Yorkshire MESMAC

Tel: 01924 211 117

Leeds LGB Switchboard

Tel: 0113 245 3588