

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual People and Mental Health: North East, Yorkshire and Humber Network

Purpose

This briefing paper is aimed at lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) organisations and mainstream agencies that will come into contact with LGB people.

As a result of discrimination, LGB people are more likely to suffer mental health problems than heterosexual people.¹ But there is little acknowledgement of these issues, let alone access to information and/or support networks. We hope to change this.

The purpose of this paper is to introduce

1. the NIMHE North East, Yorkshire and Humber LGB and Mental Health Network
2. the National Institute for Mental Health England (NIMHE) and
3. the NIMHE Sexual Orientation Special Interest Group (SOSIG)

1. NIMHE North East, Yorkshire and Humber LGB and Mental Health Network

NIMHE North East, Yorkshire and Humber is working in partnership with Gay and Lesbian Youth in Calderdale (www.galyic.org.uk) and Lesbian Information Service (www.lesbianinformationservice.org) to establish a network of agencies in the North East, Yorkshire and Humber that work on lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) mental health issues.

This would include, for example, specific LGB mental health groups, other LGB organisations and groups including those for young people, old people, disabled people, black and minority ethnic people, sexual health, and umbrella organisations such as switchboards, networks, etc., as well as mainstream services including mental health and alcohol/drug treatment agencies whose clientele will include LGBs.

The initial plan is to

1. establish an email list of organisations who work with LGBs and mental health issues,
2. organise a regional get together to look at how the network can move forward and
3. establish a virtual network on the NIMHE Knowledge Community.

¹ "The Mental Health and Social Wellbeing of Gays, Lesbians and Bisexuals in England and Wales" King et al, MIND, 2003

The NIMHE Sexual Orientation Special Interest Group (SOSIG) is in the process of establishing an LGB Mental Health e-Network on the NIMHE Knowledge Community website, <http://kc.nimhe.org.uk/>. Once established, members of the North East, Yorkshire and Humber LGB Network will be able to join and communicate with other similar networks across England.

2. National Institute for Mental Health in England (NIMHE)

NIMHE was launched in June 2002 with the aim of improving the quality of life for people of all ages who experience mental distress. NIMHE is part of the new Care Services Improvement Partnership, which brings together a number of health and social care initiatives. The main aim of the partnership is to provide a range of implementation, service improvement and support services to help organisations provide better outcomes for individuals, families and communities, delivered through eight regions.

The partnership will be responsible for supporting co-ordinated change in the whole range of care services by removing barriers to person-centred care. These care services include:

- Children
- Learning disability
- Mental health
- Older people
- Physical disability

Working inside and outside of the NHS, NIMHE aims to help all those involved in mental health to implement positive change, providing a gateway to learning and development, offering new opportunities to share experiences and one place to find information.

To achieve these aims, service users, families and communities are at the heart of NIMHE's work. NIMHE embraces diversity, champions achievement, helps to break down bureaucracy and promotes flexible ways of working. NIMHE is forging new partnerships at local, regional, national and international levels and taking a lead in connecting mental health research, development, delivery, monitoring and review.

The national work programmes fall into three broad categories covering:

- (1) aspects of delivery such as Booking and Choice; Communications; Community Teams; Making Partnerships Work; Mental Health Improvement Partnerships; Mental Health Promotion; Primary Care; Social Care, etc.,.
- (2) specific issues such as Anti Stigma and Discrimination; Social Inclusion; Substance Misuse; Suicide Prevention
- (3) work around specific groups of people including Black and Minority Ethnic Mental Health; Child and Adolescent Mental Health; Gender and Women's Mental Health; Older People's Mental Health; Prison Mental Health.

At this moment there is not a national work programme on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual People and Mental Health (although SOSIG are working towards this). However, these issues are being addressed under the broader Social Inclusion Programme.

For more information about NIMHE see: <http://nimhe.org.uk> which includes sections on: Service Users and Carers; News and Events; Networks and Groups; Information Resources (provides an outline of all mental health policy, strategy and guidance launched in recent years).

The work of NIMHE is delivered through eight regional development centres whose role is to put policy into practice and to resolve local challenges in developing mental health. NIMHE North East, Yorkshire and Humber is one of these centres (see www.nimheneyh.org.uk for more information).

NIMHE has recently set up the Knowledge Community website: <http://kc.nimhe.org.uk/>. This is an online space where people can exchange knowledge, information and experiences relating to any aspect of mental health to:

- improve services for people who experience mental distress
- influence how people with mental health problems are treated as part of their everyday lives (in work, education and social situations, for example).

The Knowledge Community is aimed at anyone with an interest or responsibility in mental health, including those who use mental health services, their family and friends. The Knowledge Community provides an opportunity to set up and/or join networks and groups of people, share resources, publicise events, tell people about your organisation, or find other people working in similar areas.

3. NIMHE Sexual Orientation Special Interest Group

After publication of the MIND document “The Mental Health and Social Wellbeing of Gays, Lesbians and Bisexuals in England and Wales” by Professor Michael King, NIMHE set up the Sexual Orientation Special Interest Group (SOSIG). The aim of SOSIG is to promote anti-discriminatory practice for lesbian, gay and bisexual people receiving mental health services, and people who support them. Membership includes representatives from different NIMHE development centres, the voluntary sector, academics, and the NHS. In order to pursue its aims, SOSIG has:

(1) commissioned a literature review on current research into the mental health needs of LGB people, this should be published in late 2005,

(2) begun working with NIMHE leads to ensure LGB issues are included in their work, and

(3) begun developing a national LGB Mental Health e-Network on the NIMHE Knowledge Community website.

In May 2005, the Department of Health's Equality and Human Rights Group set up the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Advisory Group (SOGIAG). SOSIG is working closely with this new group and although it is not known yet how the new group will develop, the mental health issues of LGB people will either be addressed by SOSIG as part of the NIMHE Social Inclusion programme or become a mental health section of SOGIAG, working closely with NIMHE.

For further information about the LGB Mental Health Network/SOSIG please contact Jan Bridget on 01706.817235 or email jan@galyic.org.uk.