...to the needs of older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals

Report of the one-day conference held in London in April 2002
Age Concern’s job is “to make later life a fulfilling and enjoyable experience for all older people”. We fulfil that aim in different ways. Every year we maintain and develop a wide range of activities from lobbying Ministers, Parliament and other policy makers, through wider public campaigning to delivering services to individual older people and their carers. At the heart of our work is an unshakeable commitment to the belief that older people, collectively and individually, have the same right to expect dignity and exercise choice as all other citizens.

A constant theme of our campaigning and service delivery is the diversity of older people. The needs of older people are as wide ranging as any other part of society. That is why we frequently work in partnership with other organisations and individuals where we share a common concern for the well being of older people. The combination of our general expertise across the field of ageing and the expertise of specialists can be powerful and effective for those whom we serve.

The Opening Doors conference was an event at which a great many people gave generously of their time and expertise in order to help make life better for older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals. On behalf of Age Concern I would like to thank everyone for their contributions, which have been immensely valuable to us as we develop a strategy for developing this work further. That strategy will be available shortly. Age Concern is committed to making it a reality and I look forward to doing so in partnership with other older people’s organisations, older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals and their representatives. Together, using our different skills and expertise, we can bring about change that enables older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals to enjoy a fulfilling old age.

Gordon Lishman
Director General
Introduction

In April 2002 over 200 people took part in the UK’s first national conference on the needs of older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals, organised by Age Concern England.

For the first time, older people, statutory service providers, voluntary organisations and representatives of Government from throughout the UK had the opportunity to meet, discuss, listen to one another and, most importantly, begin considering together how best to meet the diverse needs of the hitherto largely hidden population of older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals.

The conference aimed to:

- begin to highlight the needs of older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals
- help ensure their voices are heard, particularly by service providers and decision makers
- bring people and organisations together to help create policies and programmes responsive to need
- enable people to share experiences

Out of a day of inspiring presentations and workshops, animated debate and intense networking the conference produced innumerable ideas and strategies for moving forward. They are listed throughout this report, both under workshops and as action points for each sector at the end of the report.

In addition, six key recommendations emerged from the day:

- Organisations and services should explicitly include older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals and do so openly and visibly
- Work together – across communities, organisations and ages
- Raise the existence and needs of older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals everywhere and anywhere
- Don’t make assumptions about lesbians, gay men and bisexuals – wherever and whenever possible ask them what they need and want
- Recognise and respond to diversity
- Make resources available, but remember being inclusive often costs nothing.
DID SOMEBODY SAY MEALS ON WHEELS?

Illustration by Steve Bell
The conference heard from eight speakers throughout the day. Summaries of their messages follow, while full transcripts of their presentations can be found on the Opening Doors website www.ace.org.uk/openingdoors

Setting the Context

Evan Davis, Economics Editor for the BBC and well-known from the BBC TV News, chaired the morning plenary session and introduced the day with reference to the terrible bombing of the Admiral Duncan gay pub in Soho exactly three years earlier. While taking the opportunity to remember the victims of the bomb, the Chair drew out three issues arising in its aftermath that were of particular relevance to the conference.

First, the bomb was demonstration that the spirit the gay and lesbian community can muster when it tries is very striking. We need to garner some of that spirit in relation to the important issues that confront us as a community, and the issue of growing old as a lesbian or gay man is clearly one of those.

The second is the impressive results that can occur when the institutions of state are deployed constructively and co-operatively with the lesbian and gay community. We saw in the aftermath of that bomb what can actually be achieved when this happens.

And finally, remembering the bomb invites us to think about its victims. It is always a challenge on a day such as this to get our thoughts straight about gay men and lesbians as victims, about striking the right balance between not allowing ourselves too much in the way of self pity, and not forgetting the real difficulties and discriminations we can face. The very extreme suffering caused by the Soho bomb can, perhaps, help us keep a focus and perspective on that issue.
The Challenges
Director General of Age Concern England, Gordon Lishman, placed the work on lesbian and gay issues in the context of Age Concern’s wider work on equalities and introduced a number of challenges to the conference.

The conference, as with other Age Concern initiatives, was founded both in substantial policy work and a wide range of partnership work with other organisations. This was not just a one-off conference on a particular subject but part of a programme addressing issues around equalities and diversity in all the work that Age Concern does. These issues will not be addressed without a greater degree of mutual trust between organisations like Age Concern and those that represent older lesbians and gay men, particularly in local areas. That trust is all the more essential because the point at which an organisation like Age Concern comes into touch with older lesbians and gay men can be at some of the most difficult times in their lives.

“In Age Concern we are committing ourselves today, wholly and explicitly, to trying our best to be worthy of trust from the lesbian and gay community, which will enable us to respond on a basis of equity and equality to their needs whenever they arise.”

A major function of Age Concern is to challenge people who hold power: to challenge governments, whether national or local; to challenge corporations and others; and to challenge from time to time media organisations about the way in which older people are portrayed. There is no doubt that there are still significant areas for challenge in relation to meeting the needs of older lesbians and gay men in government policy. More widely, there is a continuing fact of exclusion of important parts of our society that simply arises from a lack of effort and of a commitment to include. If we do not set out to make sure that services are designed to be open, to include everybody, then by definition they will exclude.

Age Concern hopes there will, from the centre of government, be an initiative across all the Departments of State to address some of those issues of exclusion and inclusion and to work with organisations like Age Concern, which are taking on board the need to find ways in which we can most effectively and directly meet the needs of all older people.
The Government Perspective

The Rt Hon Barbara Roche MP, Minister responsible for Equalities, paid tribute to the critical role played by those lesbians, gay men and bisexuals now in their old age whose campaigning helped change the law and bring about the substantially more liberal society we have today. From the 1967 decriminalising of male homosexuality through to the recent equalisation of the age of consent for gay men, other positive amendments have also been made: to the immigration rules, allowing same sex partners of UK citizens or anyone settled here to get residence in the UK; and, following the appalling bombing in Soho, the changes to the criminal injuries compensation scheme, allowing a same sex partner to claim compensation in fatal cases.

The Minister acknowledged there is still a long way to go, however. She pledged Government consideration of modernised and strengthened legislation to amend the existing sex offence laws that discriminate against gay men, and a review of the right to register the death of a life partner, recognising that withholding this right from unmarried couples causes great distress to partners at a very difficult time. Mrs Roche also recognised the importance of the debate on Civil Partnership Registration and stressed the Government’s commitment to examining the complex issues it raises.

Summing up the scale of the change in attitudes, as well as policies, in the past 35 years the Minister added:

“I am sure that attitudes in the House will be very different this time round compared to the views expressed in the debate around the Sexual Offences Act in 1967. Then, MPs referred to homosexuality as ‘an abnormality’, a ‘dire handicap’, a ‘great sin’. One MP recommended that parliament think about how to ‘reduce the number of faulty males in the community.’ It’s hard to believe now that this was from MPs speaking in favour of the bill.”

As part of its campaign to tackle discrimination more widely, Government will be implementing the European Employment Directive to outlaw discrimination in the workplace on the ground of sexual orientation by the end of 2003, and on age discrimination by 2006. The Government has also endorsed Stonewall’s Diversity Champions scheme, which encourages employers to recognise the needs of lesbian and gay staff.
Finally, on Section 28, while unable to give a timetable for its repeal, the Minister acknowledged it was an “offensive” piece of legislation and underlined her personal, as well as the Government’s, commitment to bringing it to an end.

In conclusion, the Minister welcomed the opportunity for Government to work in partnership with other organisations by adding:

“I welcome this initiative, which has at last highlighted the very real issues of concern to many older lesbian and gay people that need to be addressed by us all.”

“We need this government, if they’re going to pick up the torch, to pick it up properly and light all the areas of discrimination, not just light the employment area please.”

Participant
Real Lives
A panel of four older lesbians and gay men – Yvonne Leddra, Mary McIntosh, David Self and Eric Stone – spoke generously to the conference of their own experiences and perspectives.

The panel brought a remarkable range of personal histories to the day: from enforced marriage and finally finding the courage to come out at 40, only to be rejected by family, to the hugely significant role of the lesbian and gay political movements of the Sixties and Seventies in helping self acceptance of being a lesbian.

There was a strong message from the panel, however, that despite having lived amidst social censure and even hostility, so long as support can be found – from a partner, friends, family, a social or political group – growing and ageing as a lesbian, gay man or bisexual remains a positive experience. Equally forceful was the message that the ageing process itself is not necessarily different for lesbians, gay men and bisexuals, but that when differences and difficulties do arise they can be acute.

“One of our problems is that our relationship to family is completely different from straight people, who depend very much on family support. Those who don’t have family are isolated and unsupported and don’t have people to help them. We need to find other ways of building those bridges across generations, to be developing other kinds of family. And it can’t just be a bunch of similar age mates growing old together because we’ll all be in each other’s bath chairs and that won’t do.”

The lesbian, gay and bisexual community is guilty to a degree of creating generational barriers, from young people having no understanding of their community’s history to the absence of social alternatives to clubbing and the almost total lack of representation of older people in the pink media. Responsibility for building intergenerational bridges was nonetheless acknowledged to lie firmly with all age groups.
“There’s a bar I go to and in the same corner every night at half past nine there’s a group of ten older gay men. They discriminate, they won’t mix and all they do is sit there all night complaining that the music’s too loud. Mix with people, talk to younger people and get their views on life instead of sitting in the corner.”

Equally challenging for older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals are the sometimes negative attitudes and policies of those service providers to whom they are obliged to turn when illness, disability or isolation strikes, from out and out homophobia to simple ignorance. Even more traumatic for same-sex couples is the brick wall that can be encountered when next of kin rules are enforced, denying many partners access to information or any involvement in decision-making.

While urging both statutory and voluntary service providers to listen and respond to the needs of older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals, the panel concluded with encouragement to older people themselves to take control of their own interests and wellbeing as much as they are able:

“We must persuade people that their final years can be made more peaceful for them and, when death comes, for their partners by making a proper will. The system has got to be managed carefully to make sure things go the way you want them to and so you don’t get the awful situation of family members overriding wishes.”
Ways Forward

Angela Mason, Executive Director of Stonewall and a veteran campaigner for lesbian and gay rights, chaired the final session of the conference and introduced three steps for taking the work forward.

What we need above all is a voice. Without a voice you wait for what you are given rather than going and getting what you’ve been waiting for. Ms Mason stressed the value of the conference as a major step in helping ensure older lesbians and gay men have a voice.

We also need a plan of action. The conference workshops threw up a huge number of ideas on all sorts of issues that affect older lesbians and gay men. We need to bring those ideas and experiences together to begin a programme of action that can be promoted within both the lesbian and gay and the wider communities.

Finally, we need to make allies and partners. Within the lesbian and gay community it’s terribly important that older lesbians and gay men have a profile, not just for our own sake but so that young gay men and lesbians have a sense of their own future. We also need allies within the many communities of older people. They are set to be one of the dynamic social movements of tomorrow and an important group to win over and influence.

The Chair added in conclusion:

“If we can organise within the ageing movement, and can learn to organise across the divide of prejudice, we will send an enormously powerful message of tolerance to the whole of society that will help all lesbians and gay men.”
A Community Response

Keynote speaker Terry Kaelber, Executive Director of SAGE USA, concluded the conference with an inspirational account of what can be achieved when the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community takes action to help care for its own older people.

SAGE (Senior Action in a Gay Environment) was founded in 1977 by a small group of community activists, gerontologists and social workers who were concerned about the impact discrimination, anti-gay bigotry and homophobia had on older LGBT people. Those activists sought to do two things:

- To ensure older LGBT people could access high quality, gay affirming professional social services and support, and
- To provide a safe place for older LGBT people to gather within their community.

Before going on to describe the pioneering services SAGE has developed over the last 25 years, Terry Kaelber drew on the growing body of research in the US, all of which has profound resonance for work here in the UK.

In research conducted by the Brookdale Center on Aging in New York, it was found that older LGBT people have significantly diminished support networks when compared to the general older population:

- Up to 75% of older LGBT people live alone (compared to less than 33% in the general older population)
- 90% have no children (compared to less than 20% in the general older population)
- 80% age as single people, without a life partner or significant other (compared to less than 40% in the general older population).

For older LGBT people this translates into a lack of traditional support networks that are not replaced by the strength of other close friendships. Some 20% of older LGBT people indicated they have no one to call on in times of crisis – a rate up to ten times higher than that seen in the general older population. Research has shown that older straight people with this very profile are at increased risk of depression, substance abuse, unnecessary institutionalisation and premature death.
A major consequence is that the LGBT community is much more reliant on professional social services. Unfortunately, however, studies have shown that older LGBT people are five times less likely to access senior services than is the case in the general older population.

Why? Discrimination, anti-gay bigotry, homophobia and the ignorance of mainstream providers create tremendous barriers to services for older LGBT people. In one survey reported in the American Association of Physicians for Human Rights, 67% of doctors and medical students reported LGBT patients receiving substandard care or being denied care. In another survey of agencies serving older people in the US, 50% said that older LGBT people would not be welcomed at area senior centres if their sexual orientation were known.

As a result, when older LGBT people have no choice but to access mainstream senior services, many feel it is essential to go back into the closet to do so. The resulting invisibility is compounded by the fact that the majority of mainstream providers are heterosexist, assuming all the old people they serve are heterosexual.

In response to such clearly demonstrated need, SAGE has evolved into the world’s largest social service and advocacy organisation solely dedicated to the older LGBT community. It provides programmes and services locally in New York City to over 2000 older LGBT people each year, and education and advocacy work across the US impacting on the lives of the estimated 3 million older LGBT people living throughout America.

The four major areas to SAGE’s work are:

- Clinical and social services
- Community organising and outreach
- Advocacy and education
- Volunteering

SAGE’s work does not and could not be done in isolation from mainstream service providers. Each has a lot to offer the other and finding true allies in the mainstream provider community is a critical ingredient to shedding light on, and meeting the needs of, older LGBT people, especially since the LGBT community cannot possibly provide all the services needed as we age.
In conclusion, Terry Kaelber emphasised the unique strengths LGBT people themselves bring to these issues:

“We have had to learn to deal with the impact of marginalisation, isolation and discrimination. We have had to build replacement family structures and other new support systems in response to the AIDS crisis. It is these lessons and experiences, and it is our community’s creative energies, that we must now apply to the LGBT aging crisis.

If we have learned anything from the AIDS crisis, surely it is to treasure a long life well lived. Let us now devote ourselves to ensuring that our old age is a place we want to get to and rejoice in – and if not for us, let us do this in memory of all those for whom old age was just a dream.”
The Workshops

A major part of the conference day was devoted to workshops on topics ranging from legal and policy issues to setting up a self-help group. The key issues emerging from each workshop are summarised here, while the full list of issues and recommendations discussed is available on the Opening Doors website: www.ace.org.uk/openingdoors

Making organisations lesbian and gay friendly looked at strategies and ideas for taking an organisation from lesbian and gay-aware, to inclusive and welcoming through to developing specific services. Facilitated by Jackie Calvert, Independent trainer, consultant and counsellor, and Antony Smith, Equalities trainer and consultant.

- Awareness begins with understanding the issues today’s older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals face, including for example: couple and partnership rights; pensions and survivor rights; making medical and end of life decisions for a partner; wills and estate planning; housing; physical and mental health issues; sexual health; caring for a partner; abuse and personal safety; and spiritual issues

- Ways of ensuring services are inclusive and welcoming can begin simply by using inclusive language on forms – partner as well as spouse for example; by using the words lesbian, gay and bisexual wherever appropriate; and by using positive visual images of older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals in literature and promotional materials

- Specific services to help meet the specific needs of older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals can encompass: information and advice workshops or factsheets; a telephone helpline; advocacy services helping give older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals a voice; home visits by trained lesbian, gay and bisexual volunteers; social events and reminiscence groups

- In summary: being lesbian and gay friendly is about more than simply an absence of discrimination or not excluding – it is about positively including.
Enabling and empowering older people discussed the evolution and establishment of a local self-governing older lesbian and gay group as a model. Facilitated by Dorothy Engmann, Director, Age Concern Brighton, Hove and Portslade, and Peter Otto, Chair, Older Lesbian and Gay Men's Forum, Brighton & Hove.

- Age Concern Brighton, Hove and Portslade used its resources to facilitate the setting up of an Older Lesbian and Gay Men’s Forum in Brighton and Hove in 1998. The Forum became established as an independent group, but the support and help of Age Concern remains invaluable and close links are maintained between the two organisations.
- Word of mouth was recommended as the most effective way of reaching and recruiting new members. As many older lesbians and gay men have experienced enormous prejudice over the years, such personal recommendation remains the best guarantee of a ‘safe’ and welcoming group.
- A clearly stated and enforced confidentiality policy is essential in order to engender a sense of security within the group.
- Older lesbians and gay men have gained a stronger voice in the area since the establishment of the Forum, as its members are increasingly regularly consulted by statutory agencies and invited to sit on various committees.

Tackling ageism in lesbian and gay organisations examined how ageism may operate in lesbian and gay organisations and strategies to begin effectively combating it. Facilitated by Paul Devlin, National Development Manager – Quality and Training, Age Concern England, and Terry Kaelber, Executive Director, SAGE USA.

- Ageism manifests itself in many ways in the lesbian and gay community: the major social scene is youth oriented; visual images are all of younger people; many social activities are set up for specific age groups; fashion excludes older people; youth groups feel over 24 is ‘old’; older people are invisible in the lesbian and gay press and on the scene generally.

“We’ve identified a gap here and I think Age Concern and other organisations need to be bringing older and younger people together so they can learn about each other.”

Participant
Ageism affects people’s lives in many negative ways, for example: older people feel unwelcome; older men often feel they are viewed as ‘predators’; ignorance of a gay and lesbian history; older people become isolated and invisible; no-one learns from previous generations and valuable experience is lost.

Personal strategies to tackle ageism can include: simply thinking about getting older; challenging assumptions and opinions; seeing the positive sides of ageing; creating a cohesive voice; joining up to organisations, community groups and internet groups.

Organisational strategies to tackle ageism include: setting up and funding older lesbian and gay clubs; working with younger lesbian and gay organisations to increase awareness and respect; providing education and awareness training; motivating older people to join organisations; challenging preconceptions through visual representations, in publications and through marketing.

Fundraising looked at how projects can build the case for funding work with lesbians and gay men in their applications to funding bodies. Facilitated by Gilly Green, UK Grants Manager, Comic Relief, and Martin Jones, Director of Grants and Programmes, City Parochial Foundation.

Lesbian and gay needs are under-funded considering the proportion of the population represented. The Charities Aid Foundation analysis of grant-making in 2000 (excluding the Lottery) revealed that only 0.3% of all grants went to work with lesbians and gay men.

Recognise that the ground is now more fertile than it has ever been. Although the needs of lesbians and gay men are not new to the community, they may not have been identified by service providers and funders before. If, therefore, a funder is keen on innovation it can be argued that there is an element of innovation here.
• Acknowledge the lack of evidence-based research and statistics. Explain why there isn’t much but use what there is, even if it is anecdotal - it doesn’t have to be scientific research. Use real examples - tell human stories about real people and real issues.

• Most importantly, do not assume that lesbians and gay men are ‘charitable’ per se - it is important to make the case for charitable need. Some examples include: housing and homelessness; mental health; alcohol and drugs; violence and harassment; the need for advice, support and advocacy.

**Housing needs** examined different housing options for older lesbians and gay men and imaginative ways forward to develop good service provision. Facilitated by Mary McIntosh, Management Committee member of Polari, and Julia Shelley, Assistant Director, Grants and Programmes at hact.

• Two recent pieces of research in this area - Polari's *As We Grow Older* (1995) and North British Housing Association's *The Housing Needs of Older Lesbians and Gay Men in the North East* (1999) - included the following key recommendations: housing and community care must be seen together; existing housing stock must be adapted to meet needs; there should be some specialist provision for older lesbians and gay men; there is a need for accessible information about what does exist; involve older lesbians and gay men in planning; provide support for people to stay in their own homes.

• Gathering, monitoring and sharing information on clients’ sexual orientation would enable providers to know how much provision might be needed and to allocate people to lesbian/gay-friendly homes or sheltered housing. However, every effort would need to be taken to ensure confidentiality so that information could not be used against people.

“I do think the gay community, and I take the point this may be a gay men’s thing, can be quite hostile to, or simply prefers not to see, the older gay.”

*Participant*
A database of lesbian/gay friendly accommodation was proposed.

Produce monitoring guidance for people to assess the lesbian/gay-friendliness of homes, sheltered housing and housing associations, picking up on attitudes of staff and residents.

Lesbian health and wellbeing introduced research, current practice and key issues in the field and ideas and strategies for taking the work forward. Facilitated by Jan Bridget, Lesbian Information Service.

- Older lesbians are oppressed because of their age, sexual orientation and gender; some also experience oppression due to, for example, class, ethnicity and disability. When these oppressions are combined the result is a greater risk of poor health and well-being.
- However, the limited research that exists in relation to older lesbians and health often focuses on women who are secure with their sexuality and have the support to deal constructively with oppression - they are easier to target and more willing to take part in research - and thus to report a positive ageing experience.
- Kaiser Permanente researchers by contrast surveyed 93,311 women at 40 sites in the USA aged 50-79 years. In that survey, lesbians and bisexual women were found to have higher rates of obesity, smoking and alcohol use, scored lower on measures for mental health and social support, and used preventive screening services less often.
- That broader picture indicates that older lesbians who have experienced severe social censure and been unable to develop a positive lesbian identity are much more at risk of developing unhealthy ways of dealing with oppression, and that targeted health programmes need to focus their energies on this group.
Gay men’s health and wellbeing looked at issues affecting gay men’s health and wellbeing and ways of improving the current situation. Facilitated by Peter Robins, Secretary of the Pimpernel Group for gay men who are older, and Clive Taylor, Health Promotion Specialist, NW Lancs Health Promotion Unit.

- Particular health and wellbeing issues for older gay men can include: psychological fear of growing old; isolation and absence of support; coping with bereavement and grief; fear of and vulnerability to physical or verbal attack; negative self-perception and lack of self-esteem.
- Obstacles to accessing services and information include: the ageism, heterosexism and ignorance of many health workers; poor image of older men generally; lack of appropriate or targeted sexual and health information; the heterosexual culture of residential care homes; invisibility – particularly for minority ethnic older gay men.
- Older gay men’s needs have to be recognised and addressed at all levels, from National Service Frameworks to representation on appropriate health management and steering groups to specific inclusion in health promotion, education and evaluation materials.
- Self- and community-help strategies can include: supporting older gay men to be ‘out’ about their sexuality as much as they feel comfortable with in dealings with health services; and the setting up of voluntary support networks, communities and ‘families’ of older and younger gay men.

“This conference will be a start in giving older lesbians and gay men a voice. One that will hopefully express to the wider world the need to create policies and practices that incorporate the diversity of an ageing society. I wish Age Concern every success in their challenge to service providers, organisations and the Government to start opening doors for older lesbians and gay men.”

Stephen Fry
Mental health and wellbeing examined the social isolation factors that can affect lesbians and gay men as they get older alongside the compounding effects of unsympathetic care provision. Facilitated by Chris Gildersleeve, Senior Groupworker, PACE.

- Experiences contributing to the mental health status of lesbians, gay men and bisexuals who are aged 70 plus in 2002 include: feeling highly stigmatised; leading secretive double lives causing isolation and fear; until late 1970s psychiatry considered homosexuality to be an illness and there has been no mainstream training to change this way of thinking among those tiers of staff trained in this belief.

- Among current experiences of lesbians, gay men and bisexuals using mental health services, MIND research in 1997 indicated that many were frightened to come out to service providers, and PACE research in 1998 found that service providers themselves were embarrassed and ill informed about lesbian, gay and bisexual issues.

- Older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals face many issues that can affect their mental health: youth orientation; isolation, often with less family contact and no children; bereavement; internalised self-hatred from covering up for so many years, which can in turn affect relationships and be now too late to deal with.

- What can be done: awareness training for all staff, particularly in residential homes; joint sessions in partnership with the relevant professional bodies; develop resources for older people in the community, such as volunteers, and involve young people; build on the National Service Frameworks for Older People and Mental Health to address lesbian, gay and bisexual issues.
Transgender issues introduced the key issues through a personal account of gender identity. Facilitated by Rachael Hopkins, vice co-chair of the LGBT advisory group to the Metropolitan Police.

- Gender identity and sexuality have initially nothing to do with one another. There is a distinction between identity - the body fitting the person’s own instinctive identity, and sexual preference - which sex is preferred as a partner.
- Some post-operative transsexuals identify as lesbian or gay, some identify as straight. Service providers should not make assumptions about the sexual orientation of transsexual people, nor presume their transsexualism is a problem with which they need help.
- Older transsexuals may experience difficulties with matters such as pensions, benefits and housing because of their legal status.
- Dignity and respect for the individual were highlighted as a basic entitlement, even if the person does not conform to society's perception of ‘normal’. There is a need to educate people such as health care workers to respond to the person and not to the shape s/he inhabits, and not to treat people as curiosities.

Reminiscence introduced drama as a way to revisit stories from the past and capture the essence of stories about the lesbian and gay experience. Facilitated by Clair Chapman, Artistic Director, Spare Tyre Theatre Company, and Simon O’Corra, Independent Advocate and User Consultation worker, Diverse Identities.

- Revisiting, sharing and coming to terms with past experiences in a supportive environment can be an enormously powerful way to engender a feeling of positive identity among older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals, many of whom will have spent part of their lives in varying degrees of fear and isolation as well as joy and love.
- By way of introduction participants were asked to make a picture in their minds of an especially relevant hero or heroine, role model or event. In pairs, participants ‘sculpted’ their hero, one partner playing the hero, the other playing out his/her attitude to their significant figure. Some were tender images, some defiant, others more poignant.
One of the most moving exercises was based on an early memory about being gay – a tableau of the man who walked the length of London’s Oxford Street hand in hand with his boyfriend in the 60s – a brave thing even now.

Most workshop participants were strangers to one another and many were sharing particular memories for the first time, but through the establishment of trust and a safe environment the workshop produced an experience variously described as ‘affirming’, ‘moving’ and ‘uplifting’.

Bisexuality awareness provided an entertaining and informative investigation of the myths and realities of bisexuality. Facilitated by Jennifer Moore, trainer and workshop leader.

Older non-heterosexual people may identify as bisexual rather than lesbian or gay. Others have called themselves bisexual at some time, perhaps while moving towards a gay or lesbian identity. Older non-heterosexuals are more likely to have been married, though that doesn’t necessarily mean they consider themselves bi. The self identified out-bi community is less well known than the lesbian and gay communities, and many older people may not have heard of it.

Several different definitions of bisexuality exist, but in the bisexual movement it is largely agreed that: it doesn’t mean you have to have exactly the same feelings for both women and men; you don’t have to have acted on your feelings; if you acknowledge attractions to women and men you are accepted as part of the bi community.

Homophobia is just as likely to affect bi people as lesbians or gay men – from low self-esteem and internalised homophobia to heterosexist pressures to deny feelings of love. There can also be prejudice from the lesbian and gay communities that manifests itself in stereotyping, such as bisexuals having the best of both worlds, or being confused, uncommitted or unreliable.

There are a number of basic ways to be supportive of someone coming out as bi: accept bisexuality as a valid identity; help them separate their personal situation from the stereotypes of bisexuality; help them deal with homophobia in mainstream culture; help them recognise and deal with prejudice in lesbian and gay culture; put them in touch with other bi people.
Meeting the needs of lesbian and gay carers examined the particular issues facing lesbian women and gay men when caring for a partner, parent, relative or friend. Facilitated by Sally Knocker and Roger Newman, Alzheimer’s Society Gay and Lesbian Carers Network.

- It is hard for anyone who goes through the stress of supporting or losing someone they love through illness or disability, but if you are lesbian or gay and caring for your partner other painful difficulties and problems can be encountered: care and medical staff regularly make the assumption that the carer is a brother/sister/friend so there is the continual pressure and need to ‘come out’; staff and other residents may be homophobic, which can seriously affect the quality of a person’s care; following death, families of the deceased partner often take over without consulting the surviving partner.

- From service providers there is a need for: targeted resources for older gay and lesbian carers regardless of competition elsewhere; ongoing and compulsory training for staff at all levels; flexible services that recognise individual need and are not service led; clarity and advice about power of attorney, wills and the role of living wills; full recognition of partnership status and acceptance of partner’s role.

- From the lesbian and gay community there is a need for: a community based support, welfare and advocacy service targeted at lesbian and gay carers; more acceptance of older gays by the younger gay community; voluntary help from other members of the gay community, including younger people; a celebration of growing old.

Legal and civil partnership issues examined how existing law fails to provide legal recognition and protection for same sex couples, in the context of the changing legal landscape. Facilitated by Jane Gordon and Angela Patrick, Legal Officers to Lord Lester QC, The Odysseus Trust.

- The social and legislative failure to recognise same sex partnerships not only deprecates, devalues and de-legitimates those relationships, but also poses acute problems in respect of: pension provision; life insurance; inheritance; designation of ‘next of kin’ status; incapacity; property rights on separation; housing; registration of death; and causes of action based on spousal status. While this lack of recognition also affects unmarried opposite-sex cohabitees, same-sex couples are particularly disadvantaged as they cannot choose to marry.
Two models for the creation of a Partnership Registration scheme are:

1. Registration scheme for same-sex partners only, such as in most Scandinavian countries;
2. Registration scheme open to both same and opposite sex couples, such as in France.

The Civil Partnerships Bill (CPB) 2002 follows the latter model above. It is designed to remedy the lack of protection for cohabiting couples (whether opposite or same sex) in law and to give them the opportunity to register a civil partnership. It provides the framework for establishing this new kind of recognised relationship and sets out the procedure for registration and the legal consequences that follow.

Current status of CPB: the Government is conducting an interdepartmental review in relation to civil partnerships and hopes to provide the results and to set its position at the end of summer 2002. Depending on the position at that time, either an amended CPB will be introduced in the November 2002 session and/or the establishment of a special select committee to consider the Bill will be recommended.

Working in rural areas looked at the problems of accessing services, as well as the more individual needs older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals may have because of their location. Facilitated by Celia Renshaw, freelance fundraising adviser and writer, Morganhold Training and Advice, and Lin Shepherd, Information Services Manager, Age Concern Gloucestershire.

Some of the problems faced by older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals living in rural communities include: lack of information; poor transport and social facilities; no services specifically targeting the gay community; denial by service providers that older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals exist in the area; difficulty in recruiting lesbian, gay and bisexual volunteers; invisibility; pressure to conform to rural stereotypes; lack of choice; social isolation; absence of lesbian/gay/bisexual-specific information.

What can be done: promote informal networks; make greater and better use of the internet; improve transport to and from towns and between villages; education to improve attitudes; link with the media to counteract negative stereotypes; travelling libraries to be better equipped; newsletters and telephone support; strategic alliances with other organisations; need to work from bottom up.
Residential and nursing care looked at how supportive residential and nursing care for older lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender people can be and is being achieved. Facilitated by Fran Springfield, Assistant Director, Hill Homes.

- Sexuality is generally not addressed in residential/nursing homes from a heterosexual perspective - other issues around sexual orientation and gender are even less so. Examples were given of older lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender residents who did not want to ‘out’ themselves in what they experienced as hostile environments, or if they did (deliberately or not) were subjected to disrespect, ridicule or worse.
- There are, however, examples of inclusive nursing and residential care that strive to be appropriate to individual need and provided in a way that enables residents to be themselves.
- Key steps to ensuring residents’ rights are respected and needs met are: following the person-centred ‘homes are for living in’ (HAFLI) principles which relate to choice, rights, fulfilment, independence, privacy and dignity; implementation of homes’ equal opportunities policies which should explicitly include gender identity, sexual orientation and HIV status; leadership – essential for putting equal opportunities policies into practice; staff training and the building of good personal relationships between staff and individuals.

Working with statutory authorities examined working in partnership with policy and decision makers to achieve a more inclusive health and social care agenda. Facilitated by Rosie Jolly, Chief Officer, Age Concern Fylde, and Sarah Kirby, Blackpool Borough Council.

- Local Authorities seem regularly to adopt a ‘head in the sand’ attitude to sexuality – homophobia is often covert and institutionalised but discussion about sexuality is frequently blocked, even at school level. The prevalent attitude is that older or disabled people can’t be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or sexual in any way.
- Local Authorities have the power to implement certain rights, such as the right to inherit a home after a partner dies, if they wish to and they should be encouraged to be proactive in such areas.

“With the possible exception of the Pink Paper, the gay press woefully neglects us older gays.”
Participant
Additionally, many Authorities operate forums for victims of racial or domestic violence, which can act as models of good practice for similar groups for victims of homophobic abuse, who are currently less recognised and poorly served.

Increasing numbers of Authorities, including Blackpool, Croydon, Barking & Dagenham and Havering, have lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender liaison groups. Croydon’s LGBT forum, by way of example, was instrumental in getting the Council to tighten up on hate crimes. Many similar initiatives start with the voluntary sector but there is a need for more real dialogue between the two sectors.

Supporting the LGBT community around crime and safety offered advice on cutting the risk of becoming a victim of crime and how to make links with the police. Facilitated by PC Laraine Burnett, Crime Prevention Officer, Croydon Police, and Sue Sanders, LGBT advisory group to the Metropolitan Police.

- Older people are of a generation where being gay was illegal and may be afraid to report homophobic crimes to the Police in fear that they themselves may be arrested or their details held on Police records. In addition, many LGBT people do not report abuse or attacks from neighbours for fear of comeback. There can also be a general feeling that nothing will be done about it.

- To help reverse the ‘Police are the enemy’ train of thought many Forces are making themselves more aware of, and visible to, the LGBT community through LGBT liaison groups. Another initiative includes the setting up of regular ‘surgeries’ in local gay bars where LGBT people can speak to officers for advice or a chat.

- To encourage more reporting of crimes there are third party reporting forms available to the public for all hate crimes. Anyone can now also report incidents to the Police over the phone without having to give any personal information. The LGBT community must, however, be taught to use the term ‘homophobic’ when reporting such hate crimes to the Police - saying you are gay or lesbian is not enough.
Recommendations include: hate crime third party reporting forms to be accessible in the community, not just in Police stations; encouraging older LGBT people to think positively about reporting to the Police and to believe they have a right to live their lives without fear of attack and prejudice; Police to use not just the gay media but local press so that ‘hard to reach’ LGBT people are made aware of the help and support available to them.

HIV/AIDS and older people looked at the particular issues of HIV and ageing. Facilitated by Liz Barker, Field Officer, Age Concern England.

- Ten years after Age Concern London’s work ‘Breaking the Silence - HIV/AIDS and Older People’ HIV is still perceived as a young people’s issue. Research, health promotion and services remain targeted at young people with few, if any, messages or images that include older people
- The effect of combination therapies is that people who are seropositive are becoming older. This poses new medical questions such as the interaction of HIV with chronic conditions experienced in old age and the effect of drug-drug interactions
- There is a need for people working in the field of HIV to work collaboratively with those working on issues of ageing and vice-versa
- The lesbian, gay and bisexual community has much to learn from older people about survival, managing life changes and resilience.

“There are people like me who, when my partner goes into hospital, will expect all the rights of access and so on and to be treated as next of kin. But equally well there are plenty of oldies who would be terrified of the thought of being outed in such circumstances.”

Participant
Key recommendations of the conference

Action points for all:
Organisations and services should explicitly include older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals and do so openly and visibly: ‘Open to all’ strategies are insufficient as older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals are unfortunately all too used to being invisible and ignored – by society, service providers and within the overwhelmingly youth-oriented lesbian, gay and bisexual community. If we are genuinely to open up services it is first essential we send out a clear message of inclusion and welcome.

Work together – across communities, organisations and ages: No one sector or group has all the expertise, knowledge or resources to provide all the services we need as we age; we need to work on changing attitudes, ageism and homophobia as well as changing legislation; and it is essential that policies, national programmes and grass roots projects develop side by side. As allies and partners working together significant achievements can be made at all these levels.

Raise the existence and needs of older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals everywhere and anywhere: Talk about older lesbians, gay men and bisexual people at every appropriate opportunity – at conferences, meetings, seminars and interviews. The more issues and needs are raised, the more they come to be recognised, respected and acted upon.

“Over the last few decades life has improved immensely for young gay people. To be openly gay is generally less of a problem for them and finding support and companionship can be more straightforward. Many gay older people have had to face a great deal more prejudice and isolation during their lifetimes. So, encouraging older people to get more satisfaction from their lives is of prime importance.”

Claire Rayner
Don’t make assumptions about older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals – wherever and whenever possible ask them what they need and want: Successful examples such as the Police LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) Liaison Groups demonstrate the remarkable changes consultation can lead to, both in terms of encouraging positive attitudes and developing services in response to need. There are many ways to involve older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals in dialogue – from consultation groups to places on a Board to open meetings.

Recognise and respond to diversity: The older lesbian, gay and bisexual community is extremely diverse – in ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds, in the range of services and support networks available, in age, health and physical ability, in terms of economic resources and even marital status, and, critically, in attitudes towards and personal comfort level with being ‘out’. And there are, of course, differences in the life experiences of women and men. Consequently there is need for a choice of services as lesbians, gay men and bisexual people age.

Make resources available, but remember being inclusive often costs nothing: Changing attitudes, learning about needs and modifying language to be inclusive need cost nothing. Indeed, work in this field is often justified in the face of criticism with that very fact. However, training, producing information, setting up networks and creating new images, for example, all come with a price tag. Investing in equality ultimately requires cash as well as goodwill.

“More and more I realise how much older people contribute to the diversity, richness and fun of life. Older lesbians and gay men have a wealth of knowledge, wisdom and experience to pass on to those of us who are younger. Let’s not hide them away, let’s celebrate. Older lesbians and gay men have pioneered the changes to the way younger lesbians and gay men live and now they are creating change again for the future. Well done to Age Concern for getting younger lesbians and gay men thinking about the old age we all hope to have one day.”

Graham Norton

“Age Concern should appoint an officer with responsibility for lesbian, gay and bisexual issues to counteract invisibility and drive services forward.”

Participant
Key steps for . . .

National Parliaments and Assemblies
- Follow Scotland’s example by repealing Section 28 and other laws that discriminate against lesbians, gay men and bisexuals
- Implement full Civil Partnership legislation and end discrimination over issues such as pensions, inheritance tax and next of kin decisions
- Collect and monitor data on sexuality so that plans for future services can prepare for older lesbians’, gay men’s and bisexuals’ needs.

Local Government
- Recognise and use existing powers in areas such as tenancy to provide equal housing rights for lesbian, gay and bisexual partners
- Support the infrastructure needs, such as transport and mobile libraries, of older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals who are physically isolated
- Monitor and promote services for their lesbian/gay/bisexual-friendliness to enable people to make informed choices.

Statutory Services
- Recognise services’ responsibility to promote equality of opportunity and be pro-active in implementing equal opportunities and diversity policies
- Train and educate staff to be lesbian, gay and bisexual-aware and inclusive
- Consult older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals and build on successful models, such as race and gender programmes, to develop targeted services.

Age Concern
- Provide information, guidelines and advice - both for and about older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals
- Promote and provide awareness training to all organisations that work with and for older people
- Help and encourage older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals to set up their own support and pressure groups.
Voluntary Organisations

- Recognise that lesbians, gay men and bisexuals are a part of the older community and help make them more visible
- Give the support older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals need to be able to ‘come out’ and not have to live their lives in secrecy
- Provide space and help for older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals to meet for support, self-help and social events.

Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Community

- Recognise and celebrate the fact that older people are a part of the community and help make them more visible
- Promote positive images of ageing and help give young lesbians, gay men and bisexuals a sense of their history and of their future
- Encourage and help set up voluntary support networks, communities and ‘families’ of older and younger lesbians, gay men and bisexuals.

Older Lesbians, Gay Men and Bisexuals

- Find the support to come out to and make demands of statutory and voluntary service providers, and support others to do the same
- Prepare for your future by making a will and/or ‘living will’
- Help make a difference - join a group, volunteer and make contact with other generations.

“Being treated badly just because one is old is bad enough. For older lesbians and gay men being ignored or victims of harassment because of their sexuality can make life miserable or frightening. The work Age Concern is doing to break down stereotypes of older people makes life richer and more rewarding for all and it has my full support.”

Richard Wilson
Resources
Many of the contributors to the Opening Doors conference have their own websites with information on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and ageing issues and/or links with other relevant Internet resources:

Age Concern England
www.ace.org.uk/openingdoors

Bisexuality Awareness (Jennifer Moore)
www.uncharted-worlds.org/bi/

Carers (Alzheimer’s Society Gay and Lesbian Carers Network)
www.alzheimers.org.uk/carers/gaycarers.html

Civil Partnerships Bill 2002 (The Odysseus Trust)
www.odysseustrust.org

Crime and Safety (LGBT Advisory Group of the Metropolitan Police)
www.lgbtag.org

Funding
(Reaching Out – a guide for trusts and foundations on the charitable needs of lesbians and gay men)
www.acf.org.uk/

Government equalities issues
www.cabinet-office.gov.uk

Health (‘Navajo’ Project Lesbian and Gay Friendly Services Assurance Charter)
www.navajo.org.uk

HIV/AIDS self-help (Blackpool Body Positive)
www.blackpool-bodypositive.org.uk
Lesbian Information Service (Jan Bridget)
www.lesbianinformationservice.org

London Gay Men’s Chorus
www.lgmc.org.uk/intro.html

Mental Health (PACE)
www.pacehealth.org.uk

Reminiscence (Spare Tyre Theatre Company)
www.sparetyretheatrecompany.co.uk

SAGE USA
www.sageusa.org

Self-help (Older Lesbians’ and Gay Men’s Forum Brighton and Hove)
www.olgmf.org

Stonewall
www.stonewall.org.uk
And finally . . .

. . . at the end of a long day full of expectation, challenge and creativity, the London Gay Men’s Chorus came on to sing. Around the room people – gay, straight, of all ages and wholly divergent political views – felt a sense of calm, hope and reflection. When people left Opening Doors, they did so fired with ideas and lifted up by music.
Age Concern cares about all older people and believes later life should be fulfilling and enjoyable. As the leading charitable movement in the UK concerned with ageing and older people, we find effective ways to help older people stay as independent as possible. We believe that age should be valued and that individual choice is essential.

Nationally, we take a leading role in campaigning, parliamentary work, policy analysis, research, specialist information and advice provision, publishing and a wide range of training.

Our local network, supported by volunteers, provides community-based services such as lunch clubs, day centres and home visiting. Where possible, we enable older people to solve problems themselves, providing as much or as little support as they need.

Innovative programmes promote healthier lifestyles and provide older people with opportunities to give the experience of a lifetime back to their communities.