

# EVERYONE IN

THE MINORITY ETHNIC LGBT PROJECT

Working Towards Equality  
For Minority Ethnic  
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender  
People in Scotland

RESEARCH SUMMARY 2009

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***“Neither the complex oppression that LGBT people of colour face, nor its effects are hypothetical or academic.***

***They are very real.”***

***[Meide, 2001: 20]\****

***\*full reference available in Everyone In Research Report bibliography***

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# FOREWORD

“2009 marks the 40th anniversary of the Stonewall riots in America, the event that kick-started the modern international movement for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights and equality, and which we commemorate each year with LGBT Pride. Yet although Stonewall is remembered annually, the fact that the rioters were overwhelmingly African-American and Hispanic has been all too often forgotten. The vital contribution that ME/LGBT people have made to our equality and our communities, nationally and internationally, has not been fully celebrated: and too often it can seem that “there ain't no Black in the Rainbow Flag.”

“The Equality Network has always believed that we fail in our core mission to achieve true equality unless we represent the diversity of our communities. We have been proud to have worked with BEMIS, the EHRC, the Scottish Government and all the members of our Steering Group to promote inclusion of the needs and aspirations of ME/LGBT people within a national strategic agenda for change.”

*Patrick Stoakes, Director, Equality Network*

“Black and Ethnic Minorities Infrastructure in Scotland (BEMIS) has always strived to support Cross Equality work, which for various reasons, have been ignored by various stakeholders. In this context, working in partnership with the Equality Network has provided us with a great opportunity and a platform to address a very delicate issue in relation to race equality and ME/LGBT, who, for a long time, have been disadvantaged and excluded from having an active citizenship role and where they are valued and respected equally.

This joint research has helped in shedding light into the problems faced by ME /LGBT people and we are confident that it will stimulate attention to addressing support needs and equality issues in this setting. This joint research, definitely, has assisted in shifting attitudes within various EM groups as well as enhanced understanding among various stakeholders in relation to ME/LGBT and the need to invest in support for these disadvantaged groups.”

*Rami Ousta, Chief Executive, BEMIS*

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This work would not have been possible without the generosity of the people interviewed, the commitment of those who attended the roundtable discussion and the foresight of the steering group members. Much is also owed to all the staff at BEMIS and the Equality Network who supported this research and its authors at every stage.

The time and effort that everyone has put into this research will now provide us all with a firmer foundation from which to ensure that everyone is INcluded better in Scotland.

Thank you.

# IDENTITY AND LANGUAGE

We all identify ourselves and are identified by others in a myriad of different ways. Given this complexity it is not surprising that there have been long standing and vigorous debates around: the validity of these descriptors; the nature and processes of identity formation; and what language is most appropriately used. These are not simply debates of terminology and taxonomy but go to the heart of how people want to be perceived and treated in the social sphere, and are integral to our sense of self and right to self expression.

Questions of identity and language arose from the beginning of this project and continued through each stage of the research. Throughout this report we usually refer to 'the ME/LGBT intersection' or 'ME/LGBT people'; using this acronym as a shorthand to facilitate easier reading. We must, however, acknowledge that this 'ME/LGBT' category was contested throughout the project and we neither wish to minimise this debate nor impose our pragmatic choice of terminology for this specific project onto others.

There are a number of reasons why individuals may not classify themselves as ME/LGBT, and therefore we have prefaced the term with 'who may identify as ME/LGBT' when possible. We hope that the reader will read the term in the broadest possible sense to include as wide a range of people and views as possible. This is important as the people to whom we are referring as 'ME/LGBT' are not one homogeneous group but come in an infinite array of races, ethnicities, sexual orientations and gender identities. They are also from all ages, religions and classes and therefore conceptualise their identities differently, as do we all.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

It is necessary that any work that is developed for people who are ME/LGBT has a sound theoretical as well as practical focus. The majority of the literature we have reviewed comes from the UK, with some additional materials examining the European context and a limited number of studies from Canada and America. We were unable to identify any Scottish work specific to discrimination against ME/LGBT people.

## **THEORETICAL, ACADEMIC AND LEGAL LITERATURE**

This first part of the literature review looks at a number of key legal and theoretical issues that will impact on the way that services aimed at achieving equality for people who are ME/LGBT are developed. The following themes emerged.

### **Understanding multiple and intersectional discrimination**

Multiple discrimination was commonly seen as where discrimination occurs on more than one ground, usually but not always those strands recognised within equality legislation. Studies consistently stressed the “profound impacts” on individuals who experience discrimination on more than one ground and the “cumulative effects” of multiple discrimination.

The concept of Intersectionality, while similar to multiple discrimination, stresses that the experience of being discriminated against on one ground cannot just be added to any discrimination faced because of another ground, nor can the experiences be separated out; they must be understood as a synergistic combination.

No one definition of discrimination will be able to fully capture the unique and personalised ways in which ME/LGBT individuals from diverse backgrounds both experience and react to being discriminated against. Although the phrase “intersectional discrimination” has its flaws, it goes beyond “multiple discrimination” in that it more explicitly sets out the complex and varied nature of people's identities and experiences. Yet multiple discrimination retains the advantage of being more easily understood by the lay person and more explicitly delineates the cumulative impact of discrimination happening on more than one ground.

We therefore see both multiple and intersectional discrimination as distinctive and equally useful and valid models. However, when describing the individual subject, we prefer the more holistic concept of “intersectional identity” to the seemingly fragmented idea of “multiple identities”.

## **Race, sexual orientation and gender identity: the forgotten intersections**

Many authors offer examples or case studies to further illustrate their definitions of multiple discrimination or intersectionality. What is notable is the absence of illustrative examples that feature both race and sexual orientation and/or gender identity. We found particularly worrying the cases where a number of specific intersections are detailed but the ME/LGBT intersection remained absent or merely hinted at by phrases such as “etc” or “and so on”.

It is not surprising that, given the historical tendency towards single strand research, multiple discrimination is often discussed only in the most general terms. Nor is it problematic that where a single example of intersectionality is given then it is likely to refer to gender and race; after all it has been largely Black women who have raised the importance and pushed for the recognition of multiple discrimination as a concept. However the continuing absence of the intersection of race and sexual orientation or gender identity from the bulk of literature reviewed, and the repeated use of the “etc” and “and so on” addenda when almost every cross strand issue other than ME/LGBT has been raised, supports arguments that there is a hierarchy not just of strands, but of intersections.

## **One ground approach: compounding inequality**

Literature on multiple discrimination consistently stresses that the current legal approach of bringing discrimination cases on single grounds is compounding inequalities and preventing true recognition of the level, type and complexity of the discrimination faced by people with intersectional identities. Having to choose one ground to bring a discrimination case is widely and rightly criticised for failing to meet the needs of people whose identities intersect across strands. Such difficulties in bringing actions on multiple grounds have been compounded by a lack of helpful case law and the failure of equality legislation to provide adequate remedies.



## **STRAND SPECIFIC LITERATURE**

We reviewed reports on race and ethnicity in order to identify any references to ME/LGBT people and their needs; and similarly, reports focusing on LGBT issues to identify any references to the same intersection. The following themes emerged.

### **Sampling and Monitoring**

Most of the reports on race and ethnicity in this sample did not include any information on the intersectionality of ethnicity and sexual orientation, or gender identity. This was true of those reports which, while focused on race, made detailed reference to and /or collected data on the intersection between race and the other equality strands but did not include sexual orientation or gender identity. The sexual health studies were the only ethnicity focused reports that gathered information on sexual orientation, (but not gender identity).

Of the LGBT studies, only one report in our selection did not make any references to race or ethnicity. All of the other LGBT reports reviewed here have made efforts to include ME/LGBT people in their participatory research and are transparent about their monitoring processes. However, they have not found it easy nor have their efforts always resulted in recruiting enough respondents to make their observations generally statistically relevant. Concern was voiced that targeted recruiting through LGBT organisations, events and venues results in an under-representation of ME/LGBT people.

In some LGBT focused research, where the number of ME participants was small, they chose to use qualitative methods to enhance their overall quantitative research. For example, in one study where the sample size was small, detailed personal narratives were used and analysed to create a vivid picture of the experience of multiple discrimination. This methodology was rare, but we would encourage it as best practice.

### **General Findings around common issues**

Both reports that focused on ethnicity and those that focused on LGBT referred to some very similar issues and findings. Issues of “invisibility” and disclosure were distinctive to the LGBT strand, but, with this exception, overall the reports suggested very a similar prevalence of prejudice across all areas of life. Therefore despite any ideological or structural differences, the race and LGBT sectors could, if willing, work together around a number of key themes.

## **INTERSECTIONAL RESEARCH**

In this section we focus on literature that has focused specifically on ME people from LGBT backgrounds. There was no such literature which we were able to find from Scotland. There was much more literature concerning gay and bisexual men than there was regarding lesbians or bisexual women. We were not able to find any research specific to transgender people who are from ME backgrounds.

One of the most commonly explored themes throughout the literature reviewed is the experiences of coming out or being open about sexual orientation or gender identity. The vital emotional task of maintaining continuity between an ethnic and a sexual /gender identity is not an easy one, and does not appear to be sufficiently recognised nor supported by either the LGBT or ME sectors.

The research highlights great variety in experiences for ME/LGBT people in being open, both positive and negative. It is important to remember the variety of experiences and not slip into the temptation of stereotyping; not all Asian lesbians are trapped in arranged marriages and not all black gay men are leading double lives.

The need for a safe space was identified in several reports as being a key factor for many ME/LGBT people; not just in relation to helping them to come out, but in their ability to feel comfortable about their identity. There was a strong consensus throughout the literature that the commercial gay scene fails to provide such a safe environment for people who are ME/LGBT; as well as feeling unwelcoming, it was not uncommon to encounter racism and racial stereotyping on the scene.

The literature we reviewed shows that people who are LGBT and from a ME background may often feel apart from, rather than a part of both their LGBT and ethnic communities. This can lead to feelings of isolation, low esteem as well as confusion over identity. Some, but by no means all, people who are ME/LGBT are put in a position where they feel that they do not belong to either the LGBT community or the ME community and are forced to express one part of their identity at the expense of the other.

In the case of ME/LGBT people who have recently arrived in the UK, such as asylum seekers, the isolation can be even more marked. Sexuality can prove a barrier to accessing communities of people from their own country or region and the informal structures needed to make the transition easier. This can place newly arrived migrants at risk of sexual exploitation within the commercial gay scene.

Some of the literature on asylum relates to the issue of gay identity so as to qualify for protection. LGBT asylum seekers are likely to have to prove that they fear persecution on the basis of their membership of a particular social group. There has been much legal debate as to how to define 'particular social group'.

The importance of the relationships with the family was highlighted in several research reports. We were not able to source any large scale qualitative studies which directly compared the family experiences of ME/LGBT people with non-ME LGBT people, and therefore it is impossible to say whether homophobia within the family is more or less prevalent amongst ME communities. What the research consistently emphasises is that the impact of family rejection or alienation can be greater due to the vital role that the family plays for ME people in offering support and protection from racism and other forms of discrimination.

Religious backgrounds of people who may identify as ME/LGBT are varied but the available research and reports do not adequately reflect such diversity. From the research we were able to source it is clear that there are mixed reactions from, and within, faith organisations, and in many, but definitely not all cases, reactions from faith organisations are deemed to be negative rather than positive.

People who are ME/LGBT are exposed to racism, homophobia and transphobia. For many people this is an every day occurrence. Overall we were disappointed not to find more research that examined the experiences of violence or harassment for people who are ME/LGBT and feel that this should be a priority for future research.

Three key themes relating to health emerged from the literature: HIV, sexual health and mental health. Findings relating to HIV and sexual health were exclusively focused on gay and bisexual men. References to mental health were found across the literature, commonly in sections on the difficulties of coming out and in dealing with breakdown in family relationships. There was no research that we found that was solely focused on the mental health needs of ME/LGBT people and this would be a valuable area of further research. In relation to HIV, research suggests a heightened risk of HIV infection for ME/GB men.

Throughout the literature many ME/LGBT people have commented upon feeling stranded; in the sense that they don't know where to turn for support.

# VISITS TO ME/LGBT PROJECTS IN OTHER PARTS OF THE UK

There are no dedicated Scottish services or organisations for people who are ME/LGBT, but this is not the case in other parts of the UK. Visits were carried out to eight of these organisations. Although there are many differences between the situation for ME/LGBT people in Scotland and those in England, there is also a lot of common ground. Our findings illustrate some possible ways forward, but it is important that any future developments within Scotland remain focused on the Scottish context.

The process of researching highlighted some key points. The majority of groups doing work with people who are ME/LGBT were London-based and not all groups have a web presence. There is no formal UK wide coordination or single point of information for potential users but there were informal networks. Many groups were volunteer led and if the key organiser moved on, the group may no longer be fully functional. Overall, the ME/LGBT sector in England remained fragile and fluid. This coupled with the suggestion that some organisations may not wish to take cold calls, could possibly make it difficult for some potential users to access some services without a referral.

Despite there being many examples of good practice, there were also marked gaps in the types and level of service provision. For example, there were no projects primarily focused on the intersection of ethnicity and gender identity. Also, the geographical spread of services was patchy. Several interviewees noted that people who are ME/LGBT have to travel long distances to find support.

## **Examples of Good Practice**

There were many examples of innovation amongst the organisations visited. These were made possible by people and organisations paying attention to the following areas: Commitment; Involving and listening to ME/LGBT people; leadership from management and staff; using monitoring to identify needs; partnership work; outreach; and providing social support. The projects we visited had not come about overnight, but had usually taken many months if not years to get to where they had got to. Throughout this time, ME/LGBT activists had shown not only commitment, but a willingness to keep on speaking out for people who may identify as ME/LGBT.

## **Issues for ME/LGBT Individuals**

Interviewees highlighted a number of issues faced by ME/LGBT people in England. These included travelling long distances to find support; racism on the 'gay scene'; the need for safe spaces; isolation; need for mental health support; cultural and religious issues; issues specific to gender identity and gender stereotyping.

## **Priority Areas**

Interviewees identified work in the following areas as being priorities in their work in England: asylum seekers; family and friends of ME/LGBT people; gender and health; language barrier; rural areas, outside of major cities; and young people.

## **Overcoming Barriers: Developing Services**

This section feeds back on the conversations we had relating to funding, staffing and leadership and offers some insights into the hurdles that organisations in England have had to overcome to get to where they are today. The main barriers that these organisations tackle are: funding, sustainability, leadership and political support, evidencing need, and gaining the trust of potential service users.

## **Key Messages For Scotland**

Interviewees had the following key messages for people who are developing ME/LGBT inclusive services in Scotland: listen to and involve ME/LGBT people; be creative in raising funds and starting services; do not work alone but in partnership with others; reach out to people; remember people outside of cities and celebrate diversity through diverse arts and cultural initiatives

# INTERVIEWS WITH NATIONAL SCOTTISH EQUALITY ORGANISATIONS

This section details our visits with single strand focused services and organisations that promote equality for people from ME backgrounds, and similarly for people who are LGBT, at a national level. We also visited generic equality organisations that promote equality and rights across some or all of the seven equality strands. Between November 2008 and early February 2009 we carried out interviews with eighteen different organisations.

## EVIDENCING NEED

We asked what monitoring systems organisations had in place to gather information on ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity. Practice varied on whether and how individual strands are monitored and no systems were being used to acknowledge intersections. Linked to this point is the recurring theme of the absence of existing data and access to only limited and anecdotal information.

## EXPERIENCES OF ME/LGBT WORK IN SCOTLAND

There are very few examples of existing ME/LGBT work in Scotland. This research also asked why more services had not been developed in Scotland that focused on issues for people who are ME/LGBT and explored what barriers organisations faced in trying to develop such work. Often conversations were steered back to two things: a lack of funding and/or a lack of evidence that there is a need for this work to take place. Interviewees also highlighted capacity issues; limited overlap in work between the ME and LGBT sectors; and a lack of information and understanding. Interviewees also commented that “this is a sensitive area” and that a lack of confidence is a barrier to developing services.

Interviewees spoke about various barriers for ME/LGBT people trying to access existing services. Issues around faith, culture, racism, community and family pressures, homophobia and differences in how people identify themselves were all touched upon at several of our visits. There was also a strong consensus that community level research is needed in order to increase our understanding of these issues. A commonly mentioned barrier was that of language. Another was the importance of the service being safe, friendly and user focused.



Around half of frontline organisations commented that they were concerned that by asking service users about their sexual orientation they may upset their wider clientele. Such nervousness is likely to be picked up by service users and could be a factor in people not being more open. Due to these and other factors explained in more detail in the full report, it can be safely assumed that individuals who are ME/LGBT are likely to find it difficult to know where to turn to for support. This can be exacerbated by marketing materials for LGBT services not including racial diversity and those for ME and other services being heterocentric.

## **LEADERSHIP**

Throughout the interviews there was a strong consensus that existing services could do more to address the needs of ME/LGBT people and that more needs to be done to build partnerships, develop awareness-raising training and tackle key policy issues around the ME/LGBT intersection. There was also consensus that what is needed is for existing services to do more work and boost their capacity, rather than for new stand-alone services to be created.

The interviews uncovered a substantial willingness to do more around the ME/LGBT intersection. All of the participating organisations noted that they are willing to investigate how they can incorporate the ME/LGBT intersection more in their work. Many organisations volunteered that they would need guidance or assistance in order to do so most effectively and some of these indicated that they would welcome stronger and clearer messages from either the Scottish Government or EHRC on how they should be developing policy and practice on intersectionality.

## **TRAINING**

Most existing training that is being accessed is being delivered internally, unless the skills required refer to a strand where there is an internal knowledge gap and a clear case can be made for paying an external trainer. All training discussed either focused on single strands or Human Rights. Even where training does refer to different strands, the vast majority does not go so far as to look at intersectionality, but is usually done as parallel strands. Some training makes some reference to intersectionality, but not in depth. No interviewees had received any training that focused on the ME/LGBT intersection.

Interviewees spoke about a variety of challenges to accessing equalities training. The most common of these are a lack of financial resources and time. Some organisations were also frustrated by the poor quality of training. While most interviewees expressed at least some interest in looking at intersectional identities and the ME/LGBT intersection in the future, some admitted that there are barriers around the will of equalities organisations to prioritise this. Although there was a broad consensus that specific training programmes that focus on the ME/LGBT intersection are needed it is clear that a lot of work needs to be done in raising awareness within organisations on the benefits of ME/LGBT specific training, before it is actually delivered. It is important that future training needs are investigated on a case by case basis and unique solutions developed for each organisation.

## **PARTNERSHIPS**

Organisations that have explored cross sector partnerships indicated a number of challenges to joint work. Firstly, they found it difficult to know who is best to build a partnership with if they are unfamiliar with the sector. Secondly, organisations need the capacity to take on new work. Thirdly, issues around funding can pose different challenges. Finally, if a champion for intersectional work within an organisation is successful in overcoming all of the above, their work is at a very high risk of being abandoned should they leave or complete their post.

The challenges are serious but not insurmountable. As long as there is the real will to adequately address intersectionality, none of these challenges should prevent effective joint working in the future. Most of these challenges stem from a lack of awareness and understanding around the ME/LGBT intersection, and intersectionality in general, coupled with a lack of information and personal contact across sectors. This can be partially remedied with platforms for networking and information exchange.

## **EQUALITIES POLICIES AND PRACTICES**

Internal policies differ greatly as to what strands are being mentioned. Much of this variation depends on what data is required by funders, as this is often used as a guide by organisations. In general, organisations that have a remit to cover multiple strands, and organisations with a higher percentage of diverse service users seem to be more confident in asking staff members diversity monitoring questions on sexual orientation. Much more work and focus is still required around awareness and confidence around gender identity



Current policies and monitoring systems are focused on multiple, but parallel strands; intersectionality is rarely addressed. A very large majority of organisations said that they were reviewing their policies. Some of these said that the interview had made them think about how to better include sexual orientation, gender identity and intersectionality in their next policy review.

## **MAKING SERVICES MORE ME/LGBT FRIENDLY**

Services that are assured that becoming more ME/LGBT friendly is possible and viable will be better able to look at building capacity through accessing training and developing partnerships. These developments could close most of the current gaps in service provision, however further work is needed in relation to social support groups and case work. Ideally, all of this will become easier with time if we collectively campaign our leaders and funders for the inclusion of intersectionality in national and funding policy, continue to tackle racism, homophobia and transphobia in our organisations and communities and endeavour to archive and record information on the ME/LGBT service users that we encounter. The proper involvement of people who may identify as ME/LGBT in this process will be key to its success.

# ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

In order to explore in more detail what changes are needed to address the needs of people who may identify as ME/LGBT in Scotland, a half day roundtable discussion event was held in Glasgow in February 2009. This day built on the information gleaned from the literature review and interviews with both Scottish and English organisations. The roundtable was important in informing our ideas and suggestions for future developments, both in relation to policy and services.

The roundtable was attended by thirty six people; bringing together LGBT and ME organisations; equality, rights and advice organisations, statutory and voluntary sector bodies as well as half a dozen individuals who may identify as ME/LGBT. It was the first event of its kind in Scotland. It represented an important milestone in itself, as it brought people together from diverse backgrounds to openly discuss the ME/LGBT intersection; a topic that for too long had not been openly discussed.

The first discussion focused on the question: “What would we like to see change in Scotland regarding the ME/LGBT intersection?”

Five key common themes emerged from the different discussion groups. These were: the need to change attitudes; the need to develop services; better distribution of more information; the promotion and celebration of intersectional identities; and the need to address discrimination within the workplace.

The second discussion centred on the question “What can we, as organisations, do to make these changes happen?” This session aimed to move the focus of the earlier discussion about what changes are needed, to exploring ideas for future service development and policy changes. It sought practical ideas as to how work can be taken forward by asking what organisations can do to contribute to this process.

The following common themes emerged: the importance of developing services across sectors; the need for further research; the importance of addressing issues for young ME/LGBT people; ideas on promoting and celebrating intersectional identities; and ideas for future ME/LGBT specific work.

This exercise was productive in that it provided a preliminary platform for the exchange of ideas and concerns. It brought diverse organisations and people together in a safe space for the first time and achieved as much as one could expect from a very first discussion.

From the wide range of suggestions offered by delegates it is clear that work on this intersection in Scotland is possible. It is not the case that we do not have any thoughts on what we can do, and nobody is claiming that we are not able to tackle ME/LGBT related challenges or that 'nothing can be done'. Throughout the exercise there was a strong spirit of collaboration and some expressed a keen interest in contributing to taking ME/LGBT work forward. The event was also an example of how cross sector partnership work between the ME and LGBT strands is possible and can be fruitful.

# THE WAY FORWARD

Over a nine month period, our research has examined the level of understanding of the needs of and issues faced by people in Scotland who may identify as ME/LGBT. We have reviewed how key Scottish organisations have so far responded to these needs, both in terms of service provision, policy development and equalities monitoring. We have discussed their ideas for future work as well as their future training needs.

Our work has been informed by a major review of literature on issues ranging from the difference between intersectional and multiple discrimination; how previous research did or did not monitor both race and sexual orientation/gender identity and evidence of the specific needs of people who are ME/LGBT, for example, in relation to safety and community support. We have learnt from and been inspired by our visits to existing ME/LGBT Projects in England and discussed our early findings at a roundtable event which broke new ground by bringing together ME and LGBT organisations along with ME/LGBT individuals.

This research process has started many conversations, instigated possible new partnerships and has identified many gaps both in data and service provision.

This final section brings together the different elements of our research and draws together the most important messages and key conclusions. It highlights not just the most important common themes to emerge from the different stages of this research, but some early or unexpected outcomes from actually carrying out the research. It also explains how equality for ME/LGBT people will not be achieved unless encouraging words of support are turned into concrete actions. Finally, it sets out ten guiding principles that need to be at the heart of any future ME/LGBT work and offers some initial recommendations as to how to build on such principles.

# KEY THEMES

Throughout all the research , a number of key themes emerged.

Firstly at the heart of any service development or policy initiatives should be **the voice of ME/LGBT people** themselves. The UK visits illustrated how ME/LGBT projects in England had succeeded because they had actively involved individuals who are ME/LGBT in their planning, delivery and evaluation. Similarly, the roundtable discussions revealed a strong consensus about the importance of involving ME/LGBT people and of not making assumptions or generalisations.

The constraints of our funding meant that all our research interviews took place with organisations rather than individual ME/LGBT people. Therefore the voices we heard were not those of the people for whom this report is ultimately seeking to help. This shortcoming perhaps influences the second key theme to emerge across all parts of the research: **the need for more concrete information, data and the need for further community based research.**

Through the literature review it was highlighted how there had been no previous research carried out in Scotland that examined the intersection of race with sexual orientation or gender identity. It was also shown that research reports that focused on ME or LGBT as individual strands had also failed to adequately address this intersection. In the Scottish interviews specific data gaps were highlighted as a difficulty in extrapolating information relating to the ME/LGBT intersection. Even where there are separate data sets about race, sexual orientation and gender identity, it is difficult to fully analyse this in relation to the intersection. For example, there is some data available around health, but none of the single strand data sets flag up the issue of “curative” measures as much as this intersectional discussion did.

Yet despite the gaps in knowledge and data, this was not seen by most as the main barrier to services actually being developed. The needs of people who are ME/LGBT cannot be addressed by research alone, and there are many lessons we can learn from both the findings of the literature review as well as our visits to existing projects in England. The consensus was that research should be carried out alongside, and not instead of, **the development of services and policies.**

Linked to this gap in data is another key emerging theme: **the need for greater consistency in the way that Scottish equality organisations carry out monitoring and capturing data in relation to race, sexual orientation and, where appropriate, gender identity.** Practice on this was very mixed, and there were repeated calls for clearer guidance. The most common reason given as to why such data has not been gathered was a lack of confidence amongst workers to tackle what was seen as a “sensitive” subject.

This leads us to another common theme: **the need for training** to equip staff members in both frontline and second tier agencies with the skills and confidence to better address the needs of ME/LGBT service users. Both the Scottish interviews and the roundtable discussions reported a strong need for such training, delivered across all sectors and available equally to frontline staff, equality workers and senior managers/policy makers.

A consensus emerged from the research that what is needed is a boost to the capacity and confidence of existing services in Scotland rather than the creation of a whole new sector just for ME/LGBT people. This draws us into our next key theme: **the need for greater work across and between sectors**, and in particular for stronger partnerships between ME and LGBT organisations. Such partnerships are needed not only to break down barriers and increase understanding, but in order to pool limited resources and be able to offer more holistic and inclusive services to all members of ME and LGBT communities.

Within the literature review, the single strand research showed that ME and LGBT people often experience similar problems. For example, there were common findings relating to discrimination, poor housing and mental health. It is these commonalities, together with shared agendas of working towards equality for all, that should inform and inspire such partnerships across sectors.

At the same time there is also a need to also work beyond these to wholly engage with the intersection so that issues and experiences specific to the intersection are not excluded. The primary examples of these being the complexities of multiple discrimination and the barriers experienced by ME/LGBT people when accessing single strand services.

The often repeated finding that people who are ME/LGBT are at risk of discrimination on more than one equality ground and that due to the intersectional nature of this discrimination, it can have damaging and long-lasting effects. There was widely felt to be **an absence of safe spaces in Scotland** where people can come forward to openly discuss their experiences of discrimination or harassment and a shortage of advice which was accessible, expert and able to tackle all aspects of a person's discriminatory experiences.

There was agreement across all the different parts of our research of the value of creating safe spaces in Scotland where ME/LGBT people could just be themselves; where they could find peer support as well as celebrate the different aspects of their identities and behaviours. Such spaces could be created with very little funding, if organisations had commitment and a little creativity.

All of the above is more easily facilitated and coordinated with **commitment and leadership at both a national policy level and at organisational level**

# EARLY PROGRESS

The actual process of carrying out this research has sown the seeds for future ME/LGBT work. This progress goes further than just having a report to act as a knowledge base for future work. By talking openly about an issue that has long been ignored, the research has already succeeded in getting issues around the ME/LGBT intersection higher up organisations' agendas.

By bringing together people from ME, LGBT and mainstream equality organisations, the research has already got people talking, not just about the issues faced by individual service users, but about how organisations with little history of joint working can start working together.

This is very much the beginning of a process but it is encouraging to see small signs of change, even before this report has been completed.

## Examples of early progress

- LGBT Youth Scotland and Scottish Refugee Council meeting to discuss closer working, staff exchanges and skills swaps, through their membership on this project's steering group.

- Ethnic Minority Law Centre developing links with UKLGIG, following on from our visit to EMLC where they said they were keen to have more LGBT cases referred to them and a request for help in accessing Scottish lawyers from UKLGIG.

Citizens Advice Scotland contacting Equality Network to help them check that their LGBT information was up to date and correct following on from our research visit.

Researchers being invited by the UK Border Agency to spend a day with staff looking at how LGBT asylum cases are processed.

Police representative attending roundtable, agreeing to bring ME and LGBT equality officers together to better understand crimes against people who may identify as ME/LGBT and researchers subsequently being invited to speak at LGBT Community Safety Forum.

Two ME/LGBT women who came to the roundtable and stayed on at the social networking indicated interest in a ME/LGBT book club for women. They have also kept in touch and have become friends.

Mental health users group seeing publicity about research, and agreeing to join our Steering Group to ensure mental health needs of ME/LGBT people can be better addressed.



In many ways, this shows that interventions to start to address the needs of people who are ME/LGBT can be simple and still have an impact. Work towards greater inclusion, equality and openness is as much about attitudes and the confidence and willingness to do more, as it is about resources, research and legislative changes.

All the above examples show the value of talking openly about the ME/LGBT intersection. It has not been as difficult as we first envisaged to get people to talk about issues that before the research started we were warned were “controversial”, “taboo” and “going to ruffle a few feathers”. Organisations have shown a willingness to explore gaps in their service delivery, to discuss ways their policies are falling short and to identify their future training needs as well as discuss the need to form new partnerships.

It is important that the momentum generated by this research is maintained, and for such small progress steps to turn into bigger strides. It is equally important that there remains a focal point to help coordinate, inspire and inform such future progress. It is hoped that the continuing partnership between BEMIS and Equality Network will act as such a coordinating hub.

However, for equality for ME/LGBT people to be taken seriously it should be seen as the responsibility of the many, rather than the few and that the encouraging words of support are turned into concrete actions.



# MOVING FROM RHETORIC TO REALITY

Equality organisations, like those working with ME or LGBT communities, face a number of competing voices for their attention. They are constantly juggling priorities, struggling to meet demands and looking for funding to just keep existing services alive. They may often lack the time to stop and examine issues that are not seen as central to their core work. Such pressures have increased as moves to transform the way equalities work is done, coincide with a major economic recession that threatens to dry up many traditional sources of funding.

There is therefore a note of caution to be sounded within our conclusions. As much as we were impressed by the willingness of organisations we visited to engage with our work it is vital that people now match their positive rhetoric with productive action.

This research has provided organisations with a small window of time, in which the issues affecting ME/LGBT people have been explored. It led not just to a number of encouraging words, but some concrete ideas and promises.

These ranged from simple steps such as getting separate ME and LGBT staff networks to have shared events to promises to update equality policies that mentioned neither sexual orientation nor gender identity; from a willingness to participate in future ME/LGBT awareness raising training to reviewing how marketing can be made more ME/LGBT friendly.

The visits to Scottish organisations also uncovered as many examples of good work and good ideas as there were gaps and possible ways of doing things better.

It is important that the many positive statements made about moving forward are used to take the next step; putting them into action and thereby maintaining this momentum. It would be interesting to return to the organisations visited in twelve or eighteen months time to see what changes, if any had occurred.

At the same time, there remains both a real opportunity and a real need for leadership at a higher level. Without strong messages of support from both the EHRC and Scottish Government; without there being both a carrot (in terms of providing sufficient resources) and a stick (in there being some way of ensuring improvements or changes in service delivery) it is likely that ME/LGBT work may not be prioritised in all but a few of the organisations we visited.

# GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Our research has enabled us to identify a number of key areas where future work is needed to bring about greater equality for people who are ME/LGBT in Scotland. Given the previous absence of any sustained or meaningful ME/LGBT work in Scotland, it can be difficult to know where to start in filling the gaps, both in service provision and knowledge.

Yet to have such a blank page to start from offers as many opportunities as it does challenges. It is clear that such work needs to be informed by the successes of existing ME/LGBT projects in England, the views of the Scottish organisations we visited and the evidence gathered during our literature review. The way that future ME/LGBT work is approached and delivered is crucial to its success. To enable the process of bringing this about seem more manageable, we have identified ten guiding principles which should remain at the core of future ME/LGBT work in Scotland.

**Leadership  
Involvement  
Research  
Coordination  
Partnership  
Information  
Development  
Access to Justice  
Social Support  
Celebration**

## LEADERSHIP

There is a clear role for both the EHRC and Scottish Government to take a strong leadership role in future ME/LGBT work in Scotland. This could be done at a variety of levels including:

- promoting best practice in relation to monitoring, use of language, development of equal opportunities policies amongst both frontline and second tier organisations
- contributing to the dissemination of the findings from this research
- consider directly commissioning or funding future initiatives that are aimed at promoting ME/LGBT inclusion and equality
- offering guidance to other cross-strand research projects about how best to approach issues relating to intersectionality.

There is also a need for leadership from national second tier ME, LGBT and rights organisations. They have a responsibility to lead by example and inspire change not just within their own organisations, but throughout the smaller community based organisations they serve and represent.

## INVOLVEMENT

It is vital that future ME/LGBT work in Scotland is directly informed by the views and experiences of ME/LGBT individuals. This could be achieved in a number of ways, including through:

- the commissioning of further research carried out at a community level
- support being provided to individual ME/LGBT users of existing mainstream, ME or LGBT services, to ensure that they feel confident, safe and able to contribute directly to the development of future ME/LGBT services

In order to encourage a greater involvement of ME/LGBT individuals it is also important that:

- there is greater consistency in the use of language around equalities by organisations in all sectors, and that this language be made more accessible and meaningful to lay-people
- there is an increased use of real life stories, case-studies and testimonies as methods for illustrating the damaging effects of intersectional discrimination
- a strategy is formed to encourage greater representation of ME/LGBT individuals in media reporting of issues relating to equalities and discrimination.

## RESEARCH

To increase our understanding of the full range of issues that affect ME/LGBT individuals in Scotland, it is clear that further research is needed. This should be carried out at a community level and be based around speaking directly to ME/LGBT individuals. Research should be carried out alongside, and not instead of, the development of services and policies. Although there are gaps in data and knowledge, this should not be used as an excuse for doing nothing.

- In the first instance it is important that this research is as inclusive as possible and acknowledges the diverse backgrounds of ME/LGBT people. For example, in terms of ethnic background, age, gender and gender identity, religion and geographical location.
- However it is also necessary to carry out further more targeted research to look in depth at the particular experiences of groups of ME/LGBT people who are seen at greatest risk of discrimination, exclusion or harassment. This could, for example, include studies that focus on women, on asylum seekers/refugees, on young people and on ME/LGBT people in rural areas.
- Similarly, it is important that broader studies that focus on issues such as mental health, hate crimes, domestic violence adequately include reference to people who are ME/LGBT.

## COORDINATION

There is a need for a central point of contact in order to ensure that information relating to the ME/LGBT intersection is disseminated and any future initiatives that take place are coordinated. This is also needed to ensure that supportive words from organisations can be turned into real commitments and definite actions.

- With the absence of anyone else taking a prominent lead on ME/LGBT issues, it is important that the partnership between the Equality Network and BEMIS continues, and that the Everyone IN Project (or an equivalent) continues to act as such a coordinating hub.
- At the same time the responsibility for actual delivery of ME/LGBT work must be seen as the responsibility of all organisations and sectors and not just that of a coordinating body.

# PARTNERSHIP

In order for equality to be achieved for people who are ME/LGBT it is necessary to unite people from different backgrounds and organisations from different sectors. A broad partnership of agencies, individuals and activists is needed in order to ensure that this work is done. This multi partner approach is crucial and should encompass mainstream organisations, statutory services as well as organisations working in the voluntary and equalities sectors.

The voices of ME/LGBT individuals should remain prominent within this partnership, which must work across faiths and cultures and not be confined to Scotland's central belt or major cities.

In order to encourage work across sectors, creative ways need to be found to break down barriers and encourage more joint working. Initial steps to bring this about could include:

- facilitation of staff swaps, whereby staff from ME organisations spend time shadowing work of LGBT organisations and vice versa
- encouragement of reciprocal training arrangements, whereby places on ME training courses are provided free of charge in return for a place on LGBT training and vice versa
- placing of links to ME and LGBT organisations on each other's websites
- that larger organisations who already have both ME and LGBT staff networks be encouraged to bring these two networks together at shared events
- forums and networks can play key roles in developing contacts, trust and partnerships

## INFORMATION

It is clear that more information is needed to be made available to both ME/LGBT individuals about services available and to organisations about issues faced by such individuals. In order to achieve this it is recommended that:

- a web resource be developed as a central point of contact for any projects supporting people who are ME/LGBT and for any individuals wishing to access such services
- a series of information resources be developed in consultation with ME/LGBT individuals which could be used as part of campaigns to tackle both homophobia and racism
- information resources also be developed that are aimed at members of the public, equality organisations and legal representatives, which can act as a guide as to how to seek redress if a person has experienced multiple discrimination and on how people can best access legal help
- that the specific needs of people who do not have English as a first language are taken account of and information resources including web content are translated into appropriate languages

## DEVELOPMENT

Our research revealed a consensus about the need to boost the capacity of existing services rather than to create brand new services. Progress towards this could be achieved through:

- the development of a toolkit highlighting good practice in relation to issues such as monitoring and intersectionality
- the availability of expert advice to organisations wishing to make their services more ME/LGBT friendly
- funding being made available for organisations wishing to do more work in relation to the ME/LGBT intersection

There is also a vital need to address barriers to accessing existing services caused by a shortage of provision of high quality interpreting services. Consideration should be given to developing a pool of specialist or accredited interpreters, who are provided with training in order that they are confident to cope with sensitive issues around culture, sexual orientation, gender identity and confidentiality.

## **SOCIAL SUPPORT**

There was strong evidence from both our literature review and our visits to organisations in England, about the important role that social support groups can play in reducing isolation amongst ME/LGBT individuals. No such support groups openly exist in Scotland. The potential value and options for locating safe spaces/social support groups should be further explored. This could be done through:

- piloting a social support group either in Edinburgh or Glasgow, to run for a twelve month period along similar lines to those already operating in Manchester or Bradford
- existing ME and LGBT organisations to be encouraged to run similar, more targeted social support groups, targeting for example, asylum seekers/refugees, young people or women

## **ACCESS TO JUSTICE**

It is important that the difficulties of the current “one ground” approach of bringing discrimination cases are tackled, both in legislation, policy and legal test cases. As a first step we recommend that a series of information resources be developed that are aimed at members of the public, equality organisations and legal representatives. These resources could act as a guide as to how to seek redress if a person has experienced multiple discrimination and on how people can best access legal help.

Such resources are needed not just on the intersection of race with sexual orientation and gender identity; but could also be used as part of a wider campaign to highlight the inadequacies of current legal protection offered to people whose identities do not easily fit into a single strand.

There is also a real need for the voices and real life experiences of people who are ME/LGBT to be heard by policy makers, lawyers, funders, rights and advice organisations and the equalities sector as a whole. The promotion of good practice through schemes such as STUC diversity champions, should continue alongside a much more determined and visible campaign to challenge multiple and intersectional discrimination.

## CELEBRATION

Finally it is also important that the diversity of Scotland's ME/LGBT community is celebrated. Greater recognition is needed to be given to their multi-faceted cultural identities and heritages. This can be achieved in many ways, including through greater collaboration between ME and LGBT focused arts projects and exploiting the opportunities presented through Black History Month, Refugee Week, LGBT History Month and Pride.

There also needs to be an acknowledgement of ME/LGBT people in their own right and not just as a subset of ME and/or LGBT people. It is important that further links are developed with existing ME/LGBT arts projects in England and consideration should be given to the practicality and impact of Scotland creating its own ME/LGBT social archive.



# CONCLUSION

This research has broken new ground by getting people talking about issues that for too long have gone unexplored. The research is very much the start of a conversation and the beginning of a process.

Both Equality Network and BEMIS remain committed to taking a lead on this process, but they alone cannot bring about the changes needed to help achieve full equality for people in Scotland who may identify as ME/LGBT.

This work is not just the responsibility of ME or LGBT organisations. It is not just the responsibility of equality organisations or the eighteen Scottish organisations we visited.

For equality to be achieved, it has to be seen as the responsibility of all sectors and services. How an ME/LGBT individual is made to feel welcome at a police station, a GP surgery or a council office is every bit as vital as how they are welcomed at an ME or LGBT voluntary organisation.

At the time of writing, the Everyone IN Project has secured extension funding until September 2009 from the Scottish Government to enable the dissemination of our research findings and to help us draw up an action plan of how to take forward ME/LGBT work in Scotland. This plan will be underpinned by the ten guiding principles set out above.

Over the coming months we will be reaching out to as many organisations as possible to see how they can help to take forward the momentum of this report. Although the Equality Network and BEMIS can continue to act as the stimulus for change, for that change to be achieved there needs to be collaboration and commitment across all sectors.

Without such a broad partnership and without actions as well as words, ME/LGBT people in Scotland will continue to remain **stranded**.

# STEERING GROUP MEMBERS

## **Dumfries and Galloway Citizens Advice Service**

Sitki Nalci, Minority Communities Service Development Project

## **Engender**

Marion Lacey, Member

## **LGBT Youth Scotland**

Mhairi Logan, Head of Policy and Mainstreaming  
(previously Nico Juetten, Policy Manager)

## **NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde**

Nuzhat Mirza, Health Improvement Officer

## **Royal Mail, West of Scotland**

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## **Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisation (SCVO)**

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## **Scottish Council of Jewish Communities**

Leah Granat, Public Affairs Officer

## **Scottish Government**

Kelly Abel, Equality Unit Division

## **Scottish Refugee Council**

Joe Brady, Operations Manager

## **Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC)**

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**This summary and the full Everyone In Report are available  
on [www.equality-network.org](http://www.equality-network.org)**

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