

polari

Report to Age Concern Camden

*A feasibility study of the needs of older
lesbians in Camden and surrounding
boroughs*

by

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August 2006

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Polari was established in 1993 by lesbians and gay men concerned that the needs and wishes of older lesbians and gay men were not being represented within existing housing and community care provision.

Polari now works strategically for greater inclusion of older lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in society and works to promote positive change in the services they receive and the opportunities that are available to them. We undertake consultation with older lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) communities and individuals, deliver training and develop projects in partnership with older LGBT people, service providers, commissioners, policy makers, and at national and local levels.

Polari's interests and activities include :

- A strategy which looks at housing, social care and other needs together, as they are experienced by older lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender people
- Development of training and awareness-raising programmes to promote inclusive, effective provision by existing service providers.
- Research commissions
- The provision of information about existing practice.
- Building a national network of organisations and individuals who have an interest in the above.
- Development of mechanisms to enable older lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender people to articulate their needs.
- The provision of information about informal social support groups of older lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender people to reduce the high levels of isolation experienced.

Definitions

Homophobia, heterosexism and heteronormativity

We use the term homophobia to mean a hostile or prejudiced attitude to people who have same sex relationships. Heterosexism, a term used by many of our respondents, and heteronormativity, refer to the assumption that everyone is heterosexual and the design of services and opportunities with that assumption, and the social exclusion of LGB people that this occasions.

LGBT-friendly

This term has been expanded from the term 'gay-friendly'. We use it to mean inclusiveness of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender older people: that services are openly welcoming and appropriate.

A note on transgender inclusion

No transgendered women who were lesbian or bisexual identified themselves to us in this study of older lesbians and bisexual women. We consulted (and reported to Age Concern Camden) separately with the Transgender organisations Press for Change and the Beaumont Society, by email exchange with a small number of transgender women, and in discussion with several transmen. We believe that to risk conflating the issues within one report is unlikely to be helpful, and the separation of the issues is generally supported by Press for Change, which believes that transgender issues may otherwise be marginalised.

HYPERLINKS – PLEASE NOTE

Many of the links we include in this report do not open from this Word document but can be pasted into a browser.

1. Introduction

i) A feasibility study of the needs of older lesbians

In June 2006 Age Concern Camden (ACC) commissioned from the voluntary organisation Polari a feasibility study into the needs of older lesbians in Camden and the City of London, which would explore how ACC and its partners might address identified needs. The study was commissioned in order to support ACC's development of a first stage application to the Big Lottery Fund's 'Reaching Communities' grant programme. Funds from Camden's Local Area Agreement and from the Corporation of London have made this work possible. The brief for the feasibility study of the needs of older lesbians is attached at Appendix 7i.

The identification of the needs of local older lesbians, and recommendations of how these could be addressed will inform a package to identify needs and improve services for the whole of Camden's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) older community, over a period of three years commencing in April 2007.

ii) Scope of the study

The study was commissioned in order to identify the needs of older lesbians in the London Borough of Camden, and the City of London. Polari's advice to ACC, from experience of consultation work with older lesbians and gay men in three other inner city boroughs¹ was that identifying and involving participants requires considerable time, more than would be possible in the short time-scale for the ACC research (June to August 2006). The identification of a substantial group of older lesbians resident in Camden, and including a range of ages and backgrounds, who were prepared to be consulted, was likely to prove a major challenge. As ACC is also engaged in discussions with neighbouring Age Concerns exploring potential sub-regional approaches it was decided that Polari could also usefully consult with older lesbians in boroughs adjacent to Camden, and in the North London area. It was also agreed that older bisexual women could usefully be invited to respond to the same consultation.

The feasibility study was designed to complement needs identification being carried out within Age Concern Camden's Older Gay Men's Support project which commenced in September 2005. Polari's study contributes to development work being carried out by the consultant engaged by ACC to bring together the Lottery application.

iii) A context for the study of older lesbians' needs

Lesbians, many of them older, have themselves been working on issues related to ageing and sexual orientation for many years: it is crucial to recognise this, as their contribution has sometimes been overlooked. This is often due to a paucity of resources available for recording, archiving and dissemination of events and articles. The welcome involvement and commitment of mainstream organisations such as Age Concern England have (through the respect they command, their greater resources and their greater access to media and government) radically changed the context in which the issues relevant to older lesbians (and also older gay men, older bisexuals and older transgender people, or LGBT people) can now be examined and discussed. Age Concern England has shown its commitment to older LGBT people by undertaking important development work and producing excellent new resources, which are listed in these pages.

iv) A timely exploration

The Age Concern Opening Doors conference of 2002² concluded with the following key recommendations:

- Organisations and services should explicitly include older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals and should do so visibly and openly.
- 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 older lesbians gay men and bisexuals – whenever and wherever ask them what they need and want.
- Recognise and respond to diversity.
- Make resources available, but remember being inclusive often costs nothing.

The present feasibility study is an example of innovative local response by a local Age Concern. Polari, most of whose work is carried out with both male and female older LGBT people, welcomes the opportunity to examine separately the needs of older lesbians (and also to begin to think about the needs of older bisexual women, which will require further study in future). There has been less focus on the specific needs of older lesbians, except by older lesbian groups themselves and Accord Housing Association whose work we describe in Sections 4 and 5, since the nineteen nineties. We believe this is a timely exploration.

2. Exploring the needs of, and provision for, older lesbians in Camden and neighbouring boroughs

i) Existing services and opportunities for older lesbians and bisexual women in Camden

There is one very active older lesbian organisation for women in London and the South East that meets in Camden, the Older Lesbian Network, while the AGLOW Older Lesbian Performance Project meets in Islington and includes Camden women. The Drill Hall, a community arts venue in Camden is now setting up activities for older lesbians. For those with email access, Ukolderlesbiansonline (UKOL) is an UK-wide email group for older lesbians. Details of these and of mixed LGBT groups in Camden, and opportunities for lesbians of all ages are given in Appendix 7v).

The LGBT voluntary and community sector, in spite of its continued struggle to obtain adequate and continuing funding (an urgent concern in the current Change Up review of the sector³) has developed various services that may be needed by older lesbians and bisexual women. These are also described in Section 7v). Further information on the wider network of organisations that may be in touch with older lesbians is provided at Appendix 7iii).

We discovered in the consultation that we undertook (a full report of which follows) that many older lesbians were not aware of the majority of the opportunities that presently exist. In many cases, and particularly in terms of social opportunities rather than services, what was available would not be accessible to them.

ii) Methodology for our consultation

Lesbian and bisexual women 55 and over in Camden and its adjacent boroughs were sought to be interviewed for the feasibility study. However lesbians from other boroughs in North and North-East London also made contact. Because it was felt their needs and experiences were largely transferable, they were also included. We used advertisements in local papers and LGBT papers, email circulars on LGBT networks, flyers in Camden's libraries and in venues used by older lesbians and bisexual women, and consultation with the Older Lesbian Network, the Camden

LGBT Forum and other LGBT organisations and networks. Lesbian web-sites were used. Some were identified through social networks known to Polari and the researcher. Camden was targeted more intensively than the other boroughs included. Three older lesbians, two in their seventies, responded to a mailing put out by Camden Council's Promoting Independence Group (PIG) to over 300 female members of the local Reference Group on older people's services and opportunities.

A mailing was put out to all care homes, sheltered units, older people's centres and organisations and services, including social services in Camden. This mailing invited recipients to display flyers and posters where users would see them. It also gave information about the study and about Age Concern's new resource by Sally Knocker: *The Whole of Me: Meeting the needs of older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals living in care homes and extra care housing* (Age Concern, 2006).

A notice to Camden staff was put on the Council's Intranet and an item was put on the older people's section of the Council's public website. There were no responses to any of these mailings to services or announcements to staff and the public. Similarly no participants came into the study from any advertisements or hundreds of flyers distributed through libraries, community organisations and lesbian and gay venues. Participants came from either the older people's Reference Group mailing put out by the Promoting Independence Group, from Polari's contacts, from the Older Lesbian Network or from email networking and word of mouth. This accords with the experience of Camden's Promoting Independence Group, and also of Better Government for Older People, that word of mouth and other forms of networking are the most effective in involving older people.

25 lesbian and bisexual women aged 55 and over were interviewed. Details of their boroughs are as follows:

Table 1 Boroughs and Participants

Borough	
Camden	11 ⁴
City of London	1
Other boroughs	13
TOTAL	25

Three of those included in the Camden total worked in Camden or had done so recently and were familiar with older services, though they were

resident in other boroughs. Some of those resident in Camden had also worked in older services in the borough in the past. We conducted six face to face interviews lasting one and a half to two hours, instead of the two we originally proposed to Age Concern Camden.⁵ These face to face interviews were requested by the interviewees who were offered a choice of contact methods. We did not develop a separate evaluation tool but used the standard one that had been developed for telephone interviews. By allowing time for more exploration of issues the face to face interviews provided more in depth material. The 19 telephone interviews took between 30 minutes and one hour, and in one case where the participant provided a great deal of information, 1.5 hours. One interview was very short, as the informant did not want to go through the whole interview. She later sent us some brief notes.

Within these 25, 12 women described themselves as White British and eight as White Other. Four women were from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds.⁶ Eight women defined themselves as disabled, 17 did not, though in the second group there were also women with impairments associated with ageing, which they mentioned in the interviews.

Advertisements for the study invited both lesbian and bisexual women aged 55 and over to respond. The main community organisation for older lesbians in the area is the Older Lesbian Network, which does not accept bisexual women, and Polari initiated discussion with Age Concern Camden about the possibility that the need might exist for a complementary service that was inclusive of bisexuals. In the study, 24 women defined themselves as lesbians; one defined herself as queer and is married to a man.⁷ There were no women who identified themselves as bisexual on our monitoring form. One bisexual woman decided after discussion not to be interviewed and does not appear in the study.

Because nearly all the material we discuss is derived from respondents who identified as lesbian, we refer mostly in the text to 'older lesbians' except where it is appropriate to be more inclusive of bisexual women or all LGBT people.

iii) Findings

In this section of the report we have included liberal use of direct quotation from older lesbians and bisexual women who responded to us. We believe it is very important that their actual words are heard. Their responses have been, in many cases, contextualised in Section 3iii) by

Polari’s experience of work with older lesbians and gay men, and with local services, since we were set up in 1993.

a) The Context for older lesbians and bisexual women

➤ *Use of mainstream services*

Key finding 1
Of the respondents 11 out of 25 (44%) were using, or had used, any council or voluntary sector services targeted to older and/or disabled people.

We chose to include the consideration not only of ‘older’ services but also of services for disabled people and mental health services used by this age group 55+. These services, which are not always segregated by age, are an important and significant part of their experience of their needs as older lesbians. In older services we have included leisure services such as 50+ exercise classes, and opportunities to use leisure services at reduced cost. While it is possible that older lesbians and bisexual women tend to under-use services, we have not undertaken a comparison with any comparable group of older people. The level of service use may relate to the age profile of our respondents, none of whom were over 80 and almost half of whom were under 60. (Lesbians and bisexual women over 80 do of course reside in the area of study, and were anecdotally referred to by participants and other informants, but none took part in the interviews or were easy for us to contact).

Table 2 Age of respondents

55-59	60-64	65-69	70-74	75-79	80-84	85-89	90+	Total
12	4	4	3	2	-	-	-	25

➤ *LGBT User-friendly services*

Key finding 2
Some of our respondents were unsure whether services they used were friendly to LGBT people, or they had mixed experiences.

Tables 3 and 4 Experience of LGBT-friendly services

Table 3 Council services

	Uses Council services targeted to older and disabled people	Finds Council services LGBT friendly	Unsure if Council services are LGBT friendly
Yes	8	5	3
No	17		
TOTAL	25		

Table 4 Voluntary sector services

	Uses voluntary sector services targeted to older and disabled people	Finds voluntary sector services LGBT friendly	Unsure if voluntary sector services are LGBT friendly	Finds some are, some aren't LGBT friendly
Yes	7	5	1	1
No	18			
TOTAL	25			

Participants were surveyed about their experience of the friendliness, sensitivity, appropriateness and accessibility to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender users of services ('LGBT-friendliness'). Though this is a small sample, it would seem from the tables above that users do not feel uniformly confident that they will receive LGBT-friendly services. The tables show the experience of those who do use services. Those who did not use services also expressed caution:

[The main issue being a lesbian using services is] not knowing how I'll be received... I feel I could cope with it at the moment [but] all sorts of insecurities come up when you are dependent on services. You don't know how you'd feel until you had to do it.

Various respondents had had good experiences, though they were not always sure service-providers realised their sexual orientation:

I don't detect anything [in sheltered housing]. There's no problem with other tenants. I'm not out. The warden is probably aware – he's fine. I have had lesbian women staying.

When a service is LGBT-friendly health benefits become available to older lesbians and bisexual women:

I go to a mini-gym associated with [a local community centre]. I use the treadmill in an older people's session – it makes an amazing difference [to the respondent's arthritis]. I find it LGBT friendly and it is run by lovely people

However many respondents are wary about services:

Everyone thinks it is ok to be gay but it is not that simple. I wouldn't want to go to things if I felt they wouldn't be [LGBT-] friendly.

One of our respondents (in a borough that has made some attempts to be LGBT-friendly) said:

The social services and health services, most Council services – it worries me [in terms of being a lesbian using services]. I won't deny my sexuality but won't bring it up. I dread the thought of using hospitals or if I had to get a home help. I don't feel confident about it or that it is suitable for me. I have little faith in the Council.

Homophobic attitudes may be expressed in the presence of older lesbians who are not recognised as such:

You get on fine with people and then they pass a remark and you think 'oh no'. If you are going to [mainstream] services and people don't react in an unkind way you think it's OK. No one talks about it.

The heterosexism of services in general was remarked on:

I don't experience harassment but I do experience heterosexist assumptions when using health services, ignoring the fact that I might not be heterosexual.

Some of those interviewed were indeed reassured by the fact that Camden or their own borough has inclusive policies that refer to sexual orientation:

I don't know if they are LGBT-friendly or not. Although, as they are funded, I think, by Camden, there shouldn't be a problem.

I would be out to staff or volunteers of services because I think it is LGBT-friendly in Islington.

Good practice was remarked on and appreciated:

My social worker went to a lesbian and gay mental health conference. I was really pleased - that it is not just out staff but straight staff too making that step.

Some of the services commended for LGBT-friendliness were Age Concern, MIND, Jewish Care, Community Safety services, the police, Swiss Cottage Library, Highgate Newtown Community Centre, health and fitness classes and Camden Victim Support.

One respondent pointed out that lesbians also need to be heterosexual-friendly:

I need people who are LGB-friendly, and LGB people need to be heterosexual-friendly. I know some lesbians who are not. I am concerned for the wider cultural context of the communities.

The main impression that we gained from the study (though we did not ask about this) is that the older lesbians we surveyed were friendly to their heterosexual peers and service providers.

➤ *Visibility of older lesbian and bisexual service users*

Key finding 3

7 of 25 respondents said they would always be open to services about their sexual orientation

Respondents to our interviews were not always 'out' as lesbians and bisexual women. Of the 25 women, 7 said they would always be out to services, 14 were sometimes out, depending on the service and other factors, and 2 were not out. These figures should be read with the awareness that we recruited participants through LGBT networks; in spite of newspaper adverts and mention in the Camden council newspaper *Your Camden* it was very hard to involve older lesbians who are not out or who are not in touch with LGBT networks.

Though we use the terms 'out' and 'not out' for convenience, being 'out of the closet' is not really an either/or choice. Those who are generally open about their sexual orientation may not be in certain circumstances.⁸ Revealing one's sexual orientation is something that is negotiated as our respondents made clear:

Everyone one I have worked with has known [I am a lesbian] but I'm a bit more cautious with people I don't know well. It depends on the people and whether I get a feeling from them it is ok.

I might be out to some [services] if I trusted them. I wouldn't want to be known as 'the lesbian'.

I wouldn't be out, not initially; I would size up the place and see what I felt like. I wouldn't walk in saying I'm a lesbian.

Even those who were usually out might not be so in certain circumstances where they felt emotionally or physically unsafe. As two different women explained:

I am very cautious who I am out to. I don't want to be targeted by someone homophobic or by someone who sees me as vulnerable and who would abuse me or take advantage.

I have a Disabled Living Allowance taxicard - which is brilliant, but I wouldn't disclose to a taxi driver that I was a raving dyke. I'm happy to be out but not at the drop of a hat. I'm very cautious, especially now I am not so fast on my feet... Who wouldn't be careful if they came into your home? There is a lot of pressure from the feminist arena to come out and be proud. But it is no good if you have a hammer smashed in your head.

One of our respondents had direct personal experience of an increase in homophobia which she perceived as having become radically worse due to the effects of Section 28:

I know about homophobia because I work in schools. The homophobia is frightening. Now lesbian and gay people are more at risk than they have ever been – risk of violence. People have been allowed to grow up with homophobia because [under Section 28] it couldn't be mentioned in schools. They've transferred all their hatred to homosexuals, and so have their children. We are a community at risk. It is assumed that it is alright to say [something homophobic].

One respondent had experience of homophobic attitudes in other services users, and this directly affected her reluctance to be out:

I am very scared about being out in a psychiatric hospital. Periodically I go into the local mental health unit: I would face a lot of harassment if I was out. This comes from both male and female patients, more than from staff.

Experiences at work within the voluntary sector or council services had an effect on our respondents, either positively or negatively:

Someone senior with power in my organisation was shocked when I came out and then didn't talk to me for months. They seemed to think I'd lied to them; it was very hurtful.

A woman who had worked professionally with the police said she might be out to them, or to library services.

Many respondents did not want to be too visible locally.

Am I out to services? Absolutely! I was raised to be political, my mother and father were trade unionists. But not to other users on the shopping bus – they are my neighbours.

In fact the woman quoted here *is* however very much involved in her local community, and others are not deterred:

I go to the local community centre, keep fit, Tai Chi and have joined a Good Neighbour Scheme. There's no unfriendliness. I don't think older people think about it very much, that's my impression.

Lesbian and gay service users may be invisible to each other:

I go to a gym session for people with disabilities and older people. I see older people and people with disabilities coming in as couples, also as partners/carers [of the person using the gym]. Some could be lesbian, gay or bisexual but I can't tell. The people with them could be partners or paid carers.

A woman who identifies as queer and who lives with a male partner, yet whose sexual orientation is an important part of her identity was concerned about heterosexist assumptions services might make:

I imagine the services have pigeonholes they think about people in. There may not be a pigeonhole for me. Because I'm married they'll think I'm heterosexual. I don't know if it will affect services but having to deal with people's annoying assumptions – it would be annoying.

Those who were always out had taken a stand to be so:

Yes, I am always out; otherwise it gets so confusing.

If I used services for older people I would have to be out.

I am always 'out'. I'm known as a lesbian in most places. In hospital a nurse said "Don't say 'lesbian', that's awful." I think social services will get a shock soon as all these politicised lesbians begin and continue to use services.

Some respondents made it clear that they expected person-centred services and that sexual orientation might not always be relevant:

Would I be out to services? It would depend. I am neither out nor not out. I am just me. If somebody asked me I would say “what is behind the question?”. I expect the service to be available to me as a person.

I don't feel my local Age Concern would be against lesbians but I don't mention it there, though I would if it were relevant in a group discussion. It makes me feel as if I am waiting for an answer if I bring it up places I don't know very well.

In general our response made clear that many services would be dealing with older lesbians and bisexual women although this will not necessarily be revealed to them.

➤ *The experience of homophobia and heterosexism*

We define these terms homophobia and heterosexism at the beginning of the report (before Section 1). See table overpage for our findings.

Key finding 4

A small proportion of our respondents had experienced direct homophobia while using services, but all did not use services other than housing and many were not out while using services. Two who had experienced homophobic harassment (in housing) had difficulty getting information in how to get support and had poor service from the housing provider.

Table 5 Homophobic harassment and discrimination Total 25

Service	Yes	No	Not sure if it was homophobia or not	Discrimination or heterosexism but not harassment	Not answered
Mental health	1 ('if I were out')				
Working in Camden				1	
Working in education	1				
Council tax			1		
Environment Dept			1		
Health				1	
Council handy-person			1		
Housing (other tenants/residents)	2		1		
Local residents opposed Camden's Lesbian Centre	1				
Vol. Org users				1	
In general			1		3
Any services		9			
TOTAL (= 25)	5	9	5	3	3

Homophobia can be hard to identify; our respondents made it clear that they often experienced discomfort that could not be pinned down and directly complained about:

You can't take it away, it's like racism, it's very subtle. You know it but you can't say for sure what it is that's going on – unless it's open.

What it is with homophobia is we tend to internalise it, we think they don't like me or have I done something wrong. There is fear because a big change has happened. We internalise it... I don't think all is won

yet. It is difficult for straight people but they say 'we don't want it shoved in our face all the time'.

Many of our respondents pointed out that they could not tell if apparent discrimination they faced was to do with their sexual orientation, their ethnicity, with misogyny or ageism.

It can be hard to distinguish it because I am a woman, I am black, a lesbian, old. I really don't know which it is but they don't know my sexuality. There is a feeling going on but you don't know why.

When one woman, out as a lesbian, had an unpleasant experience with Council Tax Benefit (where a misunderstanding was treated as if had been deliberate fraud) she thought the officer's hostility could have had a homophobic element. She had no way of telling if this was true or not.

A proportion of our respondents had worked in older people's services and this informed their understanding of the complexities of both homophobia and heterosexism:

In older people's services in Camden, which I have worked in, it is not direct harassment or homophobia. It is a feeling of 'reluctance' of some staff. With work colleagues when I come out to people there is a pulling back of intimacy. It is difficult to tell what is happening. Senior policy makers are reluctant to see the importance of sexuality.

Participants were surveyed as to whether they had experienced homophobic harassment while using services. This question could have been better phrased so that the experience of discrimination or the perception of heterosexism in services (that assume all users are heterosexual and design services for this majority part of the population only) could also have been measured. Some of our respondents pointed this out.

Some were not so certain that everything was in place that would protect them from the experience of homophobia:

[A concern I have as a lesbian using services is] other users or staff who are homophobic. There would have to be a good equalities policy and if there was no diversity policy [including sexual orientation] I wouldn't want to use the service at all. Or there would have to be a blazing row.

The existence of complaints procedures was not seen as being enough.

If I encountered homophobic attitudes I would complain but I shouldn't have to do that.

One older lesbian was concerned about the way the fear of harassment constrained her ability to complain about anti-social behaviour:

[A concern I have as a lesbian using services is] nasty neighbours – homophobic. There should be a *fast* response to harassment. Tenancy agreements don't have an emphasis on homophobia, they need to have far more stuff in about homophobia. It doesn't feel safe, you have to be "nice" all the time or they could turn on you. It stops you complaining about neighbours' anti-social behaviour because they could turn nasty (for example call you an f***ing dyke) and you'd feel like you have no support yourself. You feel no protection from the housing provider.

Two older lesbians interviewed had had extremely distressing experiences of prolonged homophobic harassment from neighbours.

In 2002 our lives were disrupted utterly by anti-social behaviour perpetrated by a new tenant, her partner and friends, who had severe drug and alcohol addiction and mental health problems ... Both of us were prescribed anti-depressants and had to stay elsewhere at times to escape from the stress caused by sleep-deprivation, constantly having to call the police due to domestic violence, being verbally and obscenely abused and have threats of violence made against ourselves... What made the situation traumatic was the lack of supportive response from our landlord, despite evidence of what we were enduring, and that they failed utterly to either respect us a same sex couple, or take into account that, as we pointed out, being older, retired, and having health problems made such harassment even harder to cope with.

The couple involved perceived their social landlord as institutionally homophobic in the way they handled the case. The housing association, they believed, treated the harassment as a 'neighbours' dispute' where both sides were equally culpable: the neighbours said the women were lesbians and 'hated men' and if anything the perpetrator was treated by the landlord as the victim.⁹ They reported that housing association officers were sent to see them who wouldn't make eye contact.

In this case the Housing Association had procedures to deal with racism but had apparently had no training on homophobic harassment and, in the experience of our respondents, was prejudiced.

A senior housing officer did not know what 'LGBT' stood for; the language was new, it indicated the lack of training. I suspect it is the case in the majority of Housing Associations in Camden, which together are as big a landlord as the LA. They don't have the same standards in terms of equalities as the Council.

While many people assume that housing association provision might feel safer than a council estate, a Council tenant in the study expressed a higher sense of safety:

I feel safer as a Council tenant because of the policies of Camden. I can say to them if [another tenant] is objectionable. I feel very lucky that Camden has policies.

The lack of information available to the two women who experienced prolonged harassment (who were not Council tenants) was marked:

I and my partner felt we had nowhere to turn on this issue, either as individuals as a political issue of housing for L and G people... We weren't aware of an anti-social behaviour section of Camden Council. The first time we managed to access any help was when we saw a poster for the LGBT Forum outside the Police Station. From that moment on we were supported but we had already gone through two years of harassment.

After the involvement of the LGBT Forum and Camden Council and the use of both ASBOs and injunctions the situation was eventually resolved. However:

The HA were really shaken up by the successful court actions undertaken by Camden Council. At the end of the process we went to the Housing Ombudsman who found the HA in the wrong. It had taken three years out of our lives and had badly affected our health and general well being.

The lack of information generally available about what can be done in cases of harassment was stressed by another respondent in this study, who had experienced harassment but not to the same distressing degree:

I think it is important to check up different places have anti-harassment policies and that lesbians know about this and know what to do. People can be very frightened of saying 'I am a lesbian and I am being harassed.' We need to tell people where they can get counselling (e.g. at PACE). With harassment the emphasis is on race so being a lesbian is forgotten. Also I don't think the local papers send out

information about where to get support on harassment. If you went to Neighbourhood Watch you might not get support.¹⁰

Older lesbians in Camden and surrounding boroughs often have long experience of dealing with anti-lesbian attitudes in their communities. One respondent in the study referred to the history of the erstwhile Lesbian Centre in Camden as an example of the existence of fear of lesbians locally, and the helpful support of the Council.

To date Camden has been very good. They did fund the Lesbian Centre, which got a lot of stick from residents. Some of them were so abusive they had to be turned out of the Town Hall. This was the early eighties. When we moved in to the centre we wrote to the local Catholic School and we invited them to meet us. At the meeting some parents and teachers were really offensive saying, for example, that they would not like their daughters to know about lesbians and that they would be in moral danger.

Once the ways to access support have been identified our respondents have tended to report a helpful response:

We have had harassment from our next door neighbour... Sometimes yes, there have been comments. We had very good support from community policing, which is lesbian-friendly.

➤ *Diversity in general*

Key finding 5

Our respondents saw their situations holistically as older people, as women, as lesbians or bisexual women, and where appropriate, as disabled people and black or minority ethnic people

The effects of ageism were mentioned by various respondents:

There is such a strong dose of ageism and when you reach a certain age [it leads to] invisibility [for older lesbians]. It applies to all older people and to the lesbian world too.

A respondent from a black and minority ethnic background explained how the combination of age, ethnicity and sexual orientation could increase one's sense of invisibility:

What affects me, an older lesbian, in using services? My racial identity. Sometimes because of the lack of ethnic minority presence [your visibility] is less and less as you grow older. Your sexuality is

second place. They see you are Asian and don't notice your sexuality. The only person who noticed was a black gay taxi driver, an older man.

Many respondents raised issues related to varied aspects of diversity, particularly disability and ethnicity. They were rightly looking for a holistic approach that went beyond seeing them as an older woman, or even an older lesbian:

People have never taken on board that age, disability, sexuality, religion, race – they are all relevant to the person. But they only see one issue at a time. You cannot see an old person as old only. You need to see them as a whole person. There are so many accusations of “political correctness” – it stops everything, it's awful. What's the point? I prefer to think in terms of personal respect.

Poor responses to service users' needs in terms of their disability or ethnicity informed the expectations they had of good practice in terms of their sexual orientation. As two different respondents said:

I've had difficult experiences with my council [not Camden] just because of my Asian name. I don't have high expectations. I was applying for a Blue Badge and had to get a form sent to the GP, they kept sending blank forms because the Council call-centre, or others to whom they passed on the info, didn't seem to be able to get my name down. It took two or three months. It doesn't incline me to be confident as a lesbian. I might be wrong but I think they would be tokenistic.

I just don't think [the staff] know the actual needs [of older lesbians] – it's like disability awareness. If you are standing up people think you can stand. It took me two years to get people to accept it that I didn't have to stand up. Carers need more training on mobility awareness, that you can do something once doesn't mean you can always do it. It doesn't mean you are faking it when you can't do it.

Existing opportunities for older people and for older lesbians do not necessarily appear attractive to BME older lesbians:

I didn't feel there was anything in [the place I visited] for a black person... Sometimes I felt people were indirectly patronising.

There were concerns that independent groups (not council funded) may not pay adequate attention to equalities:

Some women can't afford things [e.g. outings] that cost money. There are some older lesbians who don't support equalities, for example

[access for hearing impaired lesbians]. It is a broad based movement and everyone comes from a different angle.

Camden was seen by one respondent as a potentially good place for BME older lesbians to live:

In terms of ageing I might be attracted to living in Camden again, but it is financially out of the question [as an owner-occupier]. The reason I am attracted to it is its cosmopolitan nature. You don't feel like a fish out of water.

b) Older lesbians and services

➤ *Residential Care*

Key finding 6
17 out of 23 respondents who answered a question about residential care did not think that a care home in their borough would respond to their needs as an older lesbian or bisexual woman

Table 6 Residential Care Total 25

Do you think a residential care home in your borough would respond to your needs as an older LGBT person?				
<i>Borough</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>I don't know</i>	<i>Not answered</i>
Camden		9 ¹¹	1	
City				1
Other boroughs	2	9 ¹²	2	1
Total (=25)	2	18	3	2

The evaluation tool used in the interview contained two questions related to care (residential care and personal assistance in the home). These questions evoked the most emphatic answers from respondents. The level of concern on this subject seems to us to be one of the most marked features of this study. Very few respondents had much confidence that their needs as older lesbians/bisexual women would be addressed.

The direct question we asked about residential care provision in our survey mirrored the question that Age Concern Camden's researcher had

asked the older gay men surveyed through the ACC Older Gay Men's Group in the borough. The older lesbians we talked to said they would be worried how other residents would react. Older lesbians responded with comments such as 'it would be a nightmare' and 'I am hoping never to need one.' The perceptions behind these latter comments are, of course, shared by most heterosexual older people. However, older lesbians have particular concerns over and above the basic fears (amplified by television publicity about appallingly bad practice in some homes) which one lesbian expressed as 'There are more fundamental concerns like 'do they kill people?'

One lesbian in her seventies did not feel optimistic based on her experience of existing services:

I don't think they would respond to my needs. I don't think they are concerned. A lot of places you go to they know what you are but they don't bother.

A particular concern was that of being the only lesbian in a home: this is not an unreasonable anxiety given that possibly 6% of the older female population identify as lesbian.¹³ With the existence of many smaller homes of around 20-25 people, the likelihood of being the only lesbian in a home is quite high. One respondent made the point that it would be easier if lesbian and gay staff choose to be 'out' themselves, but this option for staff is not one that has traditionally been discussed in older people's services.¹⁴

Anecdotal evidence varies from the discouraging:

I know an older lesbian who went into a home in Camden. She used to be very out, but she was terrified of any focus on her. She's not out any more. They had crosses on the walls, she didn't like it but wouldn't say anything.

to more cheering reports:

I do know one older black lesbian who lives in a home. She is very much part of running it – dykes are used to running things!

I doubt it [that a residential care home would respond to my needs as an older lesbian]. I may be wrong though – I know of a woman in her eighties in sheltered accommodation, in the country, who came out. The worker found a local lesbian group for her.

The loss of lesbian community and enforced contact with people who may be homophobic is particularly dreaded:

They've got good policy in that area but staff need more training. I want to die here where I am – I don't think I would get good service. You're not among your own people.

Some were hopeful because of the particular borough they lived in ('Yes, I would think a care home in Islington would respond to my needs – I would hope so as it was Islington'). Yet faith in the equalities policies of one's council was undermined for one respondent by the documentation of bad practice generally in some care homes:

I am sure Haringey would do its best to respond to my needs. But I couldn't say. I saw a Panorama programme where people were treated awfully. I worry will I need this. It is depressing.

In spite of efforts to contact older lesbians in care homes in the short time at our disposal we were not able to interview any for this study. However some older lesbians have experience of residential care received by their parents; this had not reassured them:

My mother was in a residential home in Hampstead. I can't imagine them going out of their way for people. One woman... began to ask me personal things that I found homophobic.

Probably I wouldn't feel confident. My mother is in an older people's home, though not in Camden. I'm happy with my mother's care but I wouldn't like to go there myself. I don't think staff would take into account people's sexuality. It's not homophobic but 'illiterate about sexuality.'

Those who had professional interactions with care staff and social services were not in the main more hopeful:

[I don't feel confident about the competence of care homes to deal with us because of] my experience of care staff generally...I have done frontline training [in my own subject of expertise] and I have seen that lack of awareness in that sector, or even amongst some qualified social workers. The lack of awareness is astounding.

I cannot be certain that residential care homes would be safe for LGBT people. I have had a lot of contact with care homes in Camden through my work and unless equality training and policies were in place would be very wary.

From professional experience of the people I know who work in that sector and others in the borough they wouldn't be aware and wouldn't have policies. I wouldn't trust them to have them or to implement them. I'd rather stick needles in my eyes. Or kill myself.

Death, including gallows humour about euthanasia, was referred to as preferable by several of our respondents in this section of our survey. The vehemence of the response from older lesbians was marked:

From what I've seen of residential care homes I'd rather die than be put in one. I always think of the May Sarton book about a lesbian in a care home [*As We Are Now*¹⁵].

Respondents were concerned that loss of autonomy was particularly relevant to lesbians, who usually have to remain assertive in order to avert homophobia or heterosexism affecting them:

In terms of care homes if you are in a situation of pretty high dependency you are very vulnerable. It is hard to be assertive when you are ill.

Two women said they had often discussed the absence of sheltered housing, residential or nursing care provision specifically for lesbians. Two respondents talked about what they would do with a lottery win: one talked about her dreams of setting up a residential care home, for 'women as women', and she said that this was a point of discussion in her circle of friends. Another said lesbians asked each other 'would you want to be with your own people?' and emphasised that 'We want understanding from the Council and people who care for you'. Some lesbians we talked to would be happy to live in a mixed environment with older gay men, while some would prefer a women-only environment. Some were not so concerned that all residents should be lesbian: 'I like being with older women any way, so long as they accepted me and let me be who I am'. One respondent joked that she did not want to be dealing at that age with older heterosexual men chasing her up the corridor. She deplored the sentimental heterosexism where the only mention of care home residents' sexuality is usually when two residents of opposite sexes fell in love and moved into the same room. Another woman was concerned that women-only provision was seldom considered:

I feel that there has been a move away from women only services. I might just get something that was lesbian and gay, but the idea that you might not want to be around men is seen as odd and old-fashioned, so I think what I would prefer is unlikely to be catered for.

One woman was concerned that any LGBT innovation might be a privately provided gay 'retirement village' and not affordable to most lesbians, and another felt strongly that she would prefer it to be run by Camden council, as 'setting up outside the system doesn't help the system.' Another woman was concerned that while current policies may incline to lesbian and gay-friendliness, this may not be maintained in the future, particularly with the growth of religious fundamentalism and the opposition expressed within different faiths to the rights of LGBT people. She felt anxious that staff in care homes might have such religious beliefs: 'We are now civil partners', she said, 'but will we be treated like a married couple?' Given that older lesbians have seen the detrimental change occasioned by Section 28 to Local Authority policies in the eighties, after the sense of growing progressiveness in the seventies, it is hardly surprising that new-won recognition, even of civil partnership, can seem provisional and possibly reversible.

The inadequacy of training was a recurrent theme for many respondents, concern about the resources available for staffing in general, the low pay of care workers and the likelihood that universal training on the needs of older lesbians might not be possible when it was difficult to retain staff. Three of our interviewees were particularly concerned about the possibility of abuse of care home residents, particularly if they were lesbian, and about abuse by other residents.

If you were in a predominantly heterosexual environment you'd share a different culture from other people. I don't think it would be safe to be out because of the abuse in residential care homes between residents, and I understand staff are sometimes not properly trained. Being a lesbian would attract that kind of abuse. I would feel unable to share memories or talk about my family situation.

➤ *Personal assistance at home*

Key finding 7

3 out of 23 women who answered the question were confident that that a personal assistant (carer) in the home would be sensitive to their needs as lesbian or bisexual women.

A second question in our interviews (again mirroring the questions asked of older gay men in the survey done for Age Concern Camden) asked about personal assistance at home: the cleaning and shopping that has traditionally been described as given by 'home helps' or 'home carers'. This also includes the personal assistance needed by some older people in

rising, getting washed and dressed and going to bed, and other kinds of assistance needed by disabled older people.¹⁶

Table 7 Personal assistance Total 25

Are you confident that a personal assistant or carer would be competent to deal with the issues of an older LGBT person?				
<i>Borough</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>I don't know</i>	<i>Not answered</i>
Camden	1	8 ¹⁷	1	
City				1
Other boroughs	2	8	3	1
Total =25	3	16	4	2

These results speak of the pessimism with which older lesbians tend to think about the competence of staff to assist them sensitively. As with care homes, a few of our respondents were hopeful that diversity policies would work in their favour. But one woman was not inspired by the reputation of her council on diversity issues and was inclined to feel that much practice was tokenistic, a matter of ticking boxes rather than really being informed about the needs of lesbians and gay men.

Only two of our respondents had used personal assistance, but five others knew friends, neighbours or relatives who had this support and this did not increase confidence:

I wouldn't think they would have enough awareness. I wouldn't want them in my house. [I get that opinion] from people who've received care who've told me.

Many of the experiences [of personal assistants in the home] of friends of mine who are disabled or older have been extremely negative. Because of low pay, many of the people who do that work don't care. As an LGBT person, even in the best of health, I have felt diffident about people coming into my home. Sometimes I feel I want to hide my books. As a vulnerable older person it would be even worse.

My mother had a carer at home who was very good, warm, wonderful. Possibly [she had] some homophobia due to religious reasons. It suited my mother but not me.

Five other respondents specifically raised the issue of religiously inspired intolerance or the possibility of being 'prayed over' or 'preached at' by

domiciliary staff. Our interviewees were realistic about the diversity of personal assistance staff:

I'm not saying there aren't carers who are competent but you can't expect that. Of course some may be lesbian or gay themselves. Or perhaps a fundamentalist Christian.

While some were aware that staff with religious objections to same sex sexual relationships had a duty not to show this in their work, quite a number (and they were not all in the same social circles) had heard bad experiences of other lesbian and gay people.

One respondent was concerned about the way services were organised in a fragmented way, and the effects this had so that expertise developed was not shared:

The main problem is that as a mental health service user you get pigeonholed, then if you need personal care in the home it is a totally separate team. It concerns me how this will be addressed as I get older; I see such fragmentation of social services into mental health/disability/physical health.

Four respondents were familiar with care staff who they had managed or worked with, or with lesbian and gay clients of social services. They were not encouraged:

I don't think it's changed a lot since I was working as a social worker. I saw things that made me think I couldn't bear it. Lesbian and gay people are so scared when they have to rely on other people. They dare not make a noise [about bad services] in case you get abuse for it.

Older lesbians I met professionally [in Camden] did not feel happy with care provision and were nervous of being out.

Three respondents had been involved in training care staff themselves and they had strong and informed views about what was needed:

I feel that the kind of training that I know is given to care staff is so basic – mainly physical stuff and training on their own boundaries so they don't do too much. I don't think they get social and equalities skills, let alone equalities training, and if they do it will be very basic. I know this based on general knowledge of care staff through my work, and also from research I, and colleagues, have done in the area.

There was a particularly concern that agency staff were unlikely to be trained in diversity to the same standard as Council staff:

[Re a carer being competent to deal with your issues] Absolutely not. I would be sent someone from an agency, I don't think needs are taken into account. Someone who will ask about your ex-husband...

No I don't really think they would be competent. They usually come from an agency, usually it's contracted and they are not trained. I might ask for a lesbian carer.

In some cases the Direct Payments Scheme (payments to the service user who then chooses and employs their own staff) has been suggested as a solution. We did not ask all interviewees about their knowledge of the Direct Payments Scheme but two of our respondents, when we discussed it with them, volunteered that they did not think older people should be forced to be the employer if they did not want this role.

One of our interviewees who had had personal assistance had not had any problems with homophobia but she explained that she did not feel she could be out to those assisting her. Others felt that they would not be able to conceal their sexual orientation, which would, they said, be apparent from the books they read, pictures on the walls and that this would make them very wary of having anyone come into the home.

They emphasised the importance for staff of understanding the many kinds of difference in older people:

There is a total lack of awareness around diversity issues. People expect people to be the same.

They hoped that ideas and methods that had brought learning into their own lives could offer the same kind of satisfaction to these staff:

I would like them to have consciousness-training sessions, and not only on sexual orientation.

Many of our respondents were careful to be fair to staff providing assistance and to emphasise that they did not have direct experience to back their pessimistic views. Our interviewees were sympathetic to these staff as low paid workers (with a preponderance of women). They tended to be hopeful about the value of training rather than blaming the workers:

People like that ought to have training. No problem that people are homophobic – it is out of ignorance.

For one woman we interviewed (in her early seventies) the issue was a live one because she intended moving out of a shared lesbian house in order to live alone in her own flat. At present she had plenty of support from her younger housemates, but the price of greater autonomy in her older age would be that she might need to seek services to help her deal with regular practical tasks she could no longer achieve.

➤ *Health services*

Key finding 8

Older lesbians we interviewed raised concerns about the appropriateness of health care, which we had not enquired about. Primary care in general, and mental health services in particular, were of concern.

We did not ask about health services specifically but for some respondents this was their primary concern as older lesbians: ‘It’s health care in general: I am not happy talking to my GP and surgeon. I am not out and can’t bring things up’.

I would like a [women’s or lesbians’] health clinic. My doctors are not very aware and can’t talk about certain things and I don’t have a choice of other options. There used to be a doctors’ surgery that had women’s sessions, two of the doctors were dykes. I would use [a women’s health clinic].

There is a clear need for general services in primary care to be aware of this. For other health needs, Camden Town is also fortunate in having a women-run health centre promoting women’s health and offering low cost holistic health care and services to housebound women. <http://www.women-and-health.org/>

However one woman who would be interested was not aware of this:

I would like to see alternative medicine in this area. Anything there is could be perhaps promoted through the Older Lesbian Network. Things exist that older lesbians don’t know about.

One user of mental health services raised particular issues that emerge in that environment:

If you have pressing mental health needs you have to take what is on offer. Safety is a big issue: for instance it would nice to have a lesbian

group, but this raises safety issues for the users. The workers need to be trained to take on the issues. Everything is very pressurised in hospital so a day unit is better.

These concerns are relevant to partners of Age Concern Camden and we discuss this further in Section 3 iii).

➤ *Concerns about housing and the future*

Key finding 9

Respondents volunteered considerable concern about their future housing needs.

One of the questions we asked in the survey was a catch-all question to prompt other concerns that our respondents had about ageing as a lesbian. Responses have been included in the issues we have reported above, but it also offered an opportunity for older lesbians to volunteer their concerns about their future housing. Age Concern Camden is not, of course, planning to offer housing to older lesbians but we hope this information can be made available to Councils and other social landlords.

One woman felt she had found the right housing and it worked for her as a lesbian:

I am in sheltered housing in Camden which is very good. I am very glad I got it. If someone were stuck in a one bedroom flat on an estate... I do see people every day.

Another, also in her seventies, did not think this would work for her, yet at least:

I am not sure [at 70] I am ready for sheltered housing yet. I'm in a comfortable environment. I am looking for different housing, on my own. My health issues and needs are changing. I would hope I could say I was a lesbian....The idea of going into sheltered or something where the other tenants were not welcoming doesn't fill me with confidence. I would feel I would have to not be out.

Some our respondents wanted to live with lesbians, with women or with lesbians and gay men.

Personally I would prefer specialist accommodation. I am interested in [the model of a potential scheme Polari knows about]. When we win the Lottery we will build a sheltered scheme for gay women and men. It will [necessarily] exclude those who don't like mixed of course.

I might need sheltered housing, maybe women-only.

There should be specific provision for people who want to live in lesbian sheltered housing. Good quality housing. *With their pets.*

Some respondents did not necessarily want to live only with other older people:

Some forms of sheltered are problematic – perhaps [better] clustered with like minded people not necessarily all older. But how to deal with homophobia [if people knew we were gay]?

Many others were concerned about this. Some preferred women-only housing rather than specifically lesbian housing.

One woman hoped that alternatives would develop naturally as those who came out in the seventies aged:

Some forms of clustered housing might be a potential way forward. Flats in the same building. Houses ...within walking distance purposefully bought or let to relatively aware people re LGBT issues. Will it change naturally as more of us get older? Different options need to exist, we need a variety around the country. We need a range of provision.

Some of our respondents had been trying to make LGBT housing a reality, and her housing association had not been sympathetic:

I wrote a document for our Housing Association with other tenants to look into the feasibility of LGBT housing. The Tenant Association took it on and we got 30 replies back out of 500 from interested tenants but it never got anywhere with the HA. I was in an unique position as tenants' chair, people trusted me. The Tenants Association work was amazing, we got people dealing with race and LGBT issues. This work might be able to be resuscitated in a better climate of support from the HA itself if the matter were to be taken seriously rather than being brushed aside as unimportant.

One woman felt there was a need for a specialist service to assist older lesbians who wanted to live together in old age:

Amongst our friendship group we talk about sheltered housing – we might set up our own and live together. I feel we need a sheltered housing facilitator to help groups of friends to set up their own [housing alternatives]. We could learn from the mistakes of the commune

movement and do it differently. When we are older we may need legal help. It would be ok if such a service were LGB-friendly not LGB-specific [because there are other people, not only lesbians, who might need this]. [The trouble with] a general sheltered housing scheme is that you are not living with your own friends. We could start with existing [friendship] networks. We need more of this kind of dialogue.

We should refer here to the important initiatives being taken forward in the Co-Housing movement which are discussed under models of good practice (see OWCH in Section 5).

c) Exploring needs

➤ *Social Opportunities and Activities*

Key finding 10
The majority of our respondents thought there was a need for more social opportunities for older lesbians and/or bisexual women

We asked if older lesbians and bisexual women felt there was a need for more social opportunities for them as older lesbians and bisexual women. The majority did think so:

Table 8 Social opportunities Total 25

Borough	Now	In future	Ticked neither	Total respondents
Camden ¹⁸	9	10	1	11
City			1	1
Other boroughs	11	12	1	13
Total	20	22	3	25

Most respondents thought that there were not enough opportunities available that were suitable for them. Pubs and clubs that existed were not adequate.

All the things we don't do – that's more the point. There is an absence of collective happenings and normal lesbian life. You think it is all won and we've got it all, then you scrape the surface and realise it's a vacuum really.

'Things are not very lively now,' said one woman in her seventies. Most wanted the company of other lesbians. Another said 'However nice

[straight] people are you either become a pet or they don't like you, there is not much in between.' Discussion was popular with some:

We definitely need more social groups. We need a social group – what used to be called 'rap' groups – chat not the music! You can put subjects in a hat and pull them out. You could call it 'dykechat'. It would be nice to use council property to meet in.

This woman emphasised that she herself was a political being and needed a social network that included feminist discussion for those who were interested. Another woman talked about isolation and the way it could be approached:

Anything to break down isolation – a group would be good idea, where people turn up and talk. It needs a good facilitator; there are people [older lesbians] who have the skills...Especially on the bereavement front – anything that could break [the isolation]. It's a real need, and not only for bereavement. A North London group would be a good idea and have meetings in Camden, very central.

One of these women wanted a way for lesbians in very local areas to be linked up:

It would be lovely if lesbians round here (Swiss Cottage) could be linked up locally...I don't want to travel for miles, I want to meet lesbians round here. I would really like to have a lesbian life as well, not to be so isolated from other older lesbians... I need more genuine lesbian life. We are losing our deep sense of identity. If the Council had to train people to understand lesbians, how could they understand this?

This is something that might be possible if Age Concerns in Camden or other boroughs in the study created more local opportunities. Even small groups of four or five women meeting for coffee locally could be very supportive.

One suggestion combined health needs with social opportunities through dancing. Jackson's Lane Community Centre in Highgate has a ballroom dancing class called 'Waltzing With Hilda' which is popular with some lesbians (of all ages), however one woman explained how she preferred the dancing she had always enjoyed in women's discos.

I need to dance - my arthritis requires it! ... Line dancing is fun but it is difficult with arthritis... There are women DJs who are really good at doing 'older lesbian' music, they know just what to play. I have to have a chair nearby. The only time I lost weight was when there was a

bop. We need a bop once a month for older lesbians and bi women, or even every week!

A lunch group was also suggested:

I wouldn't be caught dead in a local older people's lunch group. Get a lesbian/bi women's lunch group in a local area, good if there were activities as well.

There were many ideas: 'Activities to keep the mind active, places to meet up and have an opportunity for healthy living'; 'training courses – on anything'; classes in the arts; 'lesbian Silver Surfers and access to cheap computers'; a gay women's choir; a lesbian swimming club; a minibus and outings to go to the seaside together; opportunities for walking together, yoga, rackets and bowls. One respondent commented that when you look on the web and in publications there now seem to be far more activities for gay men than there are for lesbians.¹⁹

Some of our respondents who were well networked had access to opportunities that others may not have known about:

I find things lesbians would find useful are not always so well advertised so people don't know they exist. I went on a 'Walking Women' lesbian holiday – I couldn't dream up a holiday better than that.

It was regretted that not every centre wanted to target older lesbians specifically:

There is a new lesbian writing class starting in Camden – the first one for nine years. Even so it [apparently] couldn't be named as aimed at 'older lesbians', just 'lesbians', even though the same centre runs other classes for older people.

Some older lesbians, however, would be happy to attend activities targeted to all lesbians, provided there was a good age mix, it was older- and disabled-friendly, and it was accessible in terms of transport and the time of day/evening when it operated. There was regret that there was no LGBT centre in North London, and the Metro Centre in Greenwich (see Appendix 5 v) was quoted as an excellent model: 'It would be good to have a venue like the Metro in Greenwich in all the towns in the UK'.

Not all the women we interviewed thought that social opportunities were lacking and two made the point that they would not associate with lesbians *simply* because of their sexual orientation.

In future, when I am very elderly - on the whole I don't like being with groups of people who are only defined by being lesbian or gay. There are other reasons why people want to be together. For me it is not a criterion for being with people, about 50% of my friends are lesbian gay or bisexual. If there were [such] services I wouldn't specifically want a lesbian/gay [service], only LGB-friendly. I find people tedious who only have lesbian friends that I don't have much in common with except their sexual orientation.

One woman said that she would be too shy to attend an older lesbian social group, and that she had been so when she was thirty also. For her the recognition by Councils and Age Concern organisations that some older women were lesbians would be extremely welcome, but she did not seek social opportunities with other lesbians.

A black lesbian we interviewed expressed a particular need for an older black lesbian group, separately organised. Such a group, 'Message to Martha', existed previously and the need still existed if funding could be found. Black lesbians, she said, don't always go to venues and groups white lesbians go to:

There is a need for older black lesbians to meet together. Southopia [a lesbian bar in South London] has a higher proportion of black lesbians [of different ages]. There are lots of black lesbians around but they think "It's too white and I'll stick out." There is no point doing it in Camden only or any one borough, it needs to be wider and not to be in north or south London, but to rotate. An accessible venue, not a long walk from a bus or train.

➤ *Addressing isolation*

Key finding 11

10 of the 24 people who answered thought a befriending service was needed now, but did not express a wish use to use one themselves in Camden. Isolation is experienced, however, and needs to be addressed.

With a mind to the isolation experienced by some older LGBT people, both the older gay men's survey and our interviews asked if a befriending service would be a good idea. Such services have been successful in providing support to older people of all sexual orientations who have become isolated through depression, ill health and impairments.²⁰

Table 9 A befriending service Total 25

Borough	Now	In future	Ticked neither	Unsure	Not answered	Total respondents
Camden	4	6	3	2		11 ²¹
City					1	1
Other boroughs	7	13				13
Total	11	19	3	2	1	25

We discovered that some of our respondents had become isolated after bereavement when partners or friends had died, when friends moved away or because of ill health.

I'm out on a limb, I think. My partner died quite a few years ago, you lose touch after your partner dies. My friends have emigrated and people have died. I used to go to the Gateways every Friday and Saturday, but I don't think it is there now.²² I used to be a club person, but you can sit in a club and feel lonely, can't you?

This woman however would not be attracted to a befriending service and preferred herself to make new friends through groups and activities: 'A befriending service – well it might be right for some. I can't say.'

One respondent, who did feel isolated herself but did not live in Camden, felt that befriending would be helpful for some disabled people and some single people:

I think that if you are a single person you are more likely to become isolated more easily. Then you have to make compromises. The more disabled you are the more you end up in isolation. People are afraid of taking it on, they feel they are going to be doing something for you. That's why befriending would be good.

Another woman with professional experience of working with older people thought befriending was a good idea but was unsure whether the particular isolated older lesbians she had known would respond to a befriending scheme:

I think [befriending] would be valuable. I have known a couple [of women] from [my work with two different older people's organisations]: women who saw themselves as gay women not lesbians, I mean not feminists. But they might not ask for services.

We heard some enthusiastic comments ('absolutely') from those who they had known women who had become isolated or were sure they existed: 'Befriending – definitely. I have known women in that situation in my life'. However none mentioned older lesbians in Camden and surrounding boroughs who they felt needed that support immediately.

One woman, who was affected socially by the fact that there were fewer activities accessible to those with impairments, felt that nonetheless she was not herself unhappy:

I can't bear the thought of sitting in another meeting! It is a voluntary loneliness. I started getting a bit withdrawn because of my hearing. I don't enjoy parties much now. It's ok at a gig but I don't expect to do any talking.

Some thought that befriending might be valuable but that social networks address the need:

It is a thought. It depends on how old you are. But if people are put in touch with lesbian organisations they would befriend you any way.

Many thought that they did not have a present need for befriending but might as they aged: "Not for me – perhaps if I am very old and all my friends die before me". Many said they were saying yes because they thought there would be other people would need it: "I wouldn't use a befriending service (at the moment I can't get to see all my friends) but I said yes for other women". One stressed that the befrienders must be lesbian or bisexual, while others did not mention this, the fact that they might not be lesbian or bisexual may not have occurred to them. There are many issues of stigma and pride that deter people from asking for befriending, as one woman said: 'If they become isolated people may keep quiet.'

Many of our respondents stressed the value of maintaining a friendship network, another told about how she had made new younger friends as those of her age had moved away:

If you have a lot of good friends who are lesbian and gay I think you're better off. People help each other when ill or something. A younger friend said "I'll always look after you, you mustn't ever think you'll be on your own." I have always had friendship with younger lesbians. Not so many of my friends are not working – the people I feel comfortable with. I'm older than most of my friends. Older lesbians I know have moved out of London.

One woman in her fifties wondered about whether it would be so easy to maintain friendships as she aged:

We put a lot of effort into our networks – I hope they are still there in twenty years from now. Will it be as easy in our middle to late seventies as our fifties? I am very aware of the effort [a friend in his seventies] makes to keep his network going. He gets a lot back.

One respondent with training skills had a valuable suggestion:

I think many people don't manage to retain friendships and it would be good if there was more support about developing and maintaining friendship skills and abilities in social networking. I have never heard of any [group work or courses relating to this].

She herself had been in a support group for over twenty years which, as well as being personally very supportive, had provided care to a member who was dying.

➤ Practical help

Key finding 12

The majority of respondents were enthusiastic about the idea of a lesbian-staffed practical help scheme but some could see other ways that their needs could be addressed.

We included a question about practical help in our interview.

Table 10 Practical help Total 25

Borough	Now	In future	Ticked neither	Unsure	Not answered	Total
Camden	6	8	3			11 ²³
City					1	1
Other boroughs	8	12		1		13
Total	14	20	3	1	1	25

We asked interviewees whether they thought a scheme for lesbian and bisexual women offering practical help, perhaps with lesbian workers as handy-people, would be needed.

Discussion focussed on a handy-person service which created an enthusiastic response ('A lesbian handy-person? Bring it on!') and some joking responses ('I'll have that straight away please!') One woman pointed out that it would far more relaxing and she wouldn't feel patronised as she did when handymen came in. Another woman said that it would mean she wouldn't have to take things down off the walls. There was a general concern about the confidentiality and sensitivity of people who come into your home. Need was expressed for easy access to female and/or lesbian/gay artisans or an LGBT-friendly handy-person service run as a community resource, with well-trained workers who have strict guidelines on confidentiality.

Not everyone felt a need for this: one already had friends who could do these tasks, and one used a LETTS scheme to address the need. Another pointed out you could have a directory of lesbians with artisan skills. Others felt that there was really no need for a specific service and that mainstream handy-person services should be LGBT-friendly and this should be a criterion for the job.

The setting up a lesbian-specific service immediately was not a first priority for those we interviewed. We discuss the need, and possible solutions, further in Section 3.

➤ *Advice, information and advocacy*

Key finding 13
Nearly all respondents felt the need for appropriate advice and information services that were informed on issues relevant to older lesbians and other LGBT people. Those that did not agree or were unsure thought that this could be run as an LGBT-friendly service. Advocacy was also raised as a need.

Table 11 Advice and Information Total 25

<i>Borough</i>	<i>Now</i>	<i>In future</i>	<i>Ticked neither</i>	<i>Unsure</i>	<i>Not answered</i>	<i>Total</i>
Camden	6	8	2	1		11
City					1	1
Other boroughs	9	11	2			13
Total	<i>15</i>	<i>19</i>	4	1	1	25

NB answers were given for 'now' and 'in future'. Therefore the figures listed in italics in this table and subsequent tables are not included to make up the total.

We asked interviewees about the need for an older lesbian-specific advice and information service, the results are displayed above. We did not ask about advocacy (and figures above do not refer to this) but some respondents raised this as a need. It seems relevant to discuss this together with advice and information services (even though advocacy is a separate and different skill from the giving of advice and information) because respondents sometimes talked about these together. Respondents did feel advice and information was an important need. One woman was not confident that general LGBT services would not be ageist, and felt that an understanding of lesbian lives and culture was needed by mainstream services for older people. It was difficult to predict when it would be needed: 'You don't know you need it 'til you need it'. One woman said that both a lesbian-specific service and an LGB-friendly service were needed.

Some who felt lesbian-specific services were not necessary said they could look on the web for information they needed. Access was an important issue for others, however:

I do think advice and information services for older lesbians and bisexual women is needed with details of what is going on in the borough, if a lesbian film came out. Anything helpful for lesbians. I would want the ability to have it on tape or a floppy or on email. I would love to have more information about what is going on locally. I didn't know when Pride was on until a week before... All I need is a short list of happenings in the borough.

One particular issue that was brought to our attention was the need for good impartial financial advice with an understanding of the lesbian community. One woman told us that many lesbians she knew were under-insured because they had worked cash in hand and had no pension. The same woman pointed out that there is a great deal of fear about old age as lesbians she knew tended to know little about what they were entitled to, the existence and rates of pension credit, for instance, were a surprise to her.

One of the women who experienced three years of homophobic harassment said:

To prevent others being vulnerable to such harassment and to ensure safety and quality of life in the community, I feel it is crucial that services specifically designed for LGBT and/or older people be well-resourced and developed – in addition to all services for older people being committed to non-discriminatory and inclusive policy and practice.

Another woman emphasised that advocacy services were also essential, though she thought that these could be mainstream ones that were LGBT-aware and friendly. It was clear that many respondents did not distinguish formally between advice and information and advocacy needs.

It was agreed that information and advice could come from an organisation like Age Concern, so long as they could be sure every member of staff was going to be sensitive and adequately trained. As one person said ‘Then, the senior officers may be but the people doing the work are different.’ There were issues specific to lesbians:

We need advice on how to make a will, the implications of being in a same sex couple, pensions. My partner’s pension doesn’t recognise me unless we do Civil Partnership, whereas mine recognises her any way. We need legal, factual information. We need to know what Civil Partnership really means [i.e. in practical terms] – there has been little about this, even in the criticism there’s been of Civil Partnership.

The implications for Age Concern Camden and other organisations providing advice and information are examined in Section 3 iii).

➤ *Bereavement support*

Key finding 14
The majority of our respondents thought appropriate bereavement support was an important need

We asked respondents if they thought there was a need for lesbian and gay and bisexual specific bereavement support. This is a question of relevance not only to local services but also to the LGBT Bereavement Service which is at present running at London Friend, though only some of our respondents were aware of it.

Table 12 Bereavement support Total 25

Borough	Now	In future	Ticked neither	Unsure	Not answered	Total
Camden	6	8	2	1		11 ²⁴
City					1	1
Other boroughs	10	11	1	1		13
Total	<i>16</i>	19	3	2	1	25

Some of our respondents felt this to be absolutely crucial:

People don't understand the depths of loneliness and sadness when [someone loses] a partner... I went to initial meetings with older gay men way back. I remember the overwhelming sadness.... I am celibate now but I would be bereft if anything happened to any of my friends. The issue of friendship.

With another respondent we discussed funerals where a bereaved friend or relative is not able to be out as a lesbian without upsetting other bereaved relatives:

Bereavement support? Oh yes.... Not just for partners but for friends. I have had three bereavements in the last year [losing] lesbian friends. We have to accommodate everyone else and curtail how we feel in order not to upset other people.

Some who had been bereaved with inadequate support were very emphatic about the need for services: 'without a shadow of a doubt.' For two of our older interviewees who had been alone since losing a partner it was particularly relevant. One said she was 'rehabilitating herself, picking up the pieces' since her partner died and another spoke of the painful behaviour of her partner's family:

Some of our friends knew [we were lesbians]. Family turn up looking for money – you think you've been accepted, but these things come up when someone dies. I thought they were fine with me until she died.

One interviewee suggested this was something the boroughs should either set up or they should fund an existing service. One woman pointed out that you couldn't necessarily expect lesbian friends to provide the right kind of support. At the same time she saw a need for a lesbian-specific service:

Some people [supporting a bereaved lesbian] expect the relationship [between two partners, one of whom has died] to be some kind of cliché relationship, they see relationships as all bad or all good. Who cares if the relationship was not ideal? When my (male) partner died someone minimised it [which hurts]. When friends die – what if you want to talk to someone, do you want to talk to someone straight? At least you want someone really trained in lesbian culture.

While many people talked about the death of friends as well as partners, two of our respondents felt that the issue was really relevant to partners and not to them as they were single. There was a proportion of

respondents who doubted that a lesbian-specific service was needed. Some felt that a lesbian-friendly service was all that was needed:

I think there is less need for this. [From my experience] I am not sure enough people would contact it. Groups that do general bereavement services should all have the training [on LGB lives and bereavement]

Mainstream services would need to be aware in order to address the needs of lesbians and understand their culture:

I am concerned though that if sexual orientation awareness is low in the public services, it will affect people who don't have networks of friends and might need an LGB person to help them connect up.

We did not distinguish between bereavement support helplines and counsellors and bereavement support groups in our question. It is possible that some respondents would have a different view about which of these they would prefer to be lesbian-specific and which could simply be lesbian-friendly.

➤ *Spirituality, Living and Dying*

Key finding 15

Respondents raised issues relevant to them about their spirituality and one shared her thoughts about planning for her death.

The opportunities presented by the interviews we undertook brought out many other issues that we had not originally included in the scope of this study. These suggest the kinds of support older lesbians and bisexual women might value from the voluntary sector and the sensitivity needed from all sectors. In discussing potential care needs one of our respondents raised the issue of a cultural difference crucial to her:

I want someone to take care of me who doesn't mind me being a lesbian woman who gets up to things on full moons and has strange looking friends.

Another respondent, who did not discuss being ill, nor was she discussing a particular spiritual path, talked at length about planning for her death. She had visited a cemetery but they had not got back to her three months later. She felt it was a subject she could not discuss with her family.

If would be good if there was a woodland [burial] site for lesbian and gay people. I have lived very much by myself all my adult life – I want to lay out to my family *now* what I want. I don't want my family of origin

to take over and have a man preaching. I would prefer bottles of champagne and a celebration, not wearing black and so on. It would be good if there were something that helps people set this up, so family doesn't take over. The family may be homophobic – for instance if you have a partner and the family don't acknowledge her – awful.

➤ *Carers and family issues*

Key finding 16

Though the needs of older lesbians who are carers were not enquired about in the interviews, respondents raised the issue.

Retrospectively we regretted that here was no question in our interview about carers' or family issues; more questions related to family issues and carers might have brought out more concerns. None of the women we interviewed talked about caring for an older lesbian partner or friend. One who was disabled mentioned the assistance she relies on from her partner. Some mentioned caring for parents and that being a lesbian with a parent needing care did raise some particular issues for them in terms of attitudes of staff supporting their parents. Another raised the issues she had seen as relevant amongst older lesbians she knew:

There are many family issues. For instance your family having someone with mental health needs, or if your children have become religious and homophobic. Carers' issues. For me it is ok as I can get on the phone or the net. But this does not necessarily meet your emotional needs. Counselling might not be what you are looking for, it could be better to meet up with others for support, a coffee, a walk and a talk about things.

d) Training for staff and volunteers of older people's services

Key finding 16

There was a unanimous belief from the 24 women that answered that training about the needs of LGBT people for staff and volunteers is immediately necessary in all services relating to older people.

Our respondents believed generally that more training 'now' about the needs of LGBT people for staff and volunteers is necessary in all services relating to older people. As two respondents said: 'Absolutely. It has been said for so long but is it happening?' And 'Yes, because we're different. There's always some twigged you'.

Table 13 Training for staff and volunteers

<i>Borough</i>	<i>Now</i>	<i>In future</i>	<i>Ticked neither</i>	<i>Unsure</i>	<i>Not answered</i>	<i>Total</i>
Camden	11	10				11
City					1	1
Brent	1	1				1
Enfield	1	1				1
Haringey	3	3				3
Islington	6	5				6
Waltham F	1	1				1
Another LA	1	1				1
Total	24	22			1	25

One woman had assumed this training must be already fully in place, but most were pessimistic about the quality or breadth of any training received on equalities, and thought that sexual orientation was likely to have been omitted or dealt with in a summary way. Many people thought that the extent of heterosexist assumptions and the general lack of knowledge about LGBT people meant that extensive training was necessary.

I have worked in LB Camden with older and disabled people in and Camden Dial-A-Ride and the Home Library Service.... This led me to understand that unless extensive training programmes are provided for staff, and equalities policies implemented, LGBT people could not always assume that they would be respected or well-treated.

As one woman stressed:

We need more than toleration. It gets at you. It is not fair to people to expect them to have the awareness having grown up in this culture any way.

The limits of training sessions were acknowledged:

Oh yes! Training straight people! People learn in very different ways. My cousin's son came out as a gay man. It shook his entire world. Now both my cousins' whole attitude has totally changed, their world is opening up. It is hard to say if a weekend seminar is the right thing. If people sign up they have an open heart, if it is mandatory you run the risk that some of them are making token gestures.

Some were sceptical that low paid workers such as care staff would ever receive adequate training.

One respondent, a trainer herself, integrated examples relating to older lesbians into other training courses:

What I do is include examples involving older lesbians into other training, to integrate and normalise [the idea of our existence]. I am concerned if older services are not up to date.

One woman who had worked in Camden was concerned that previously many voluntary sector transport services for disabled people employed lesbians and gay men, but that some of these services had lost their funding. Was training happening for workers with Dial-A-Ride and other disabled transport? She also raised the issue that awareness has to be transferred to other service users. Respondents felt that all workers deserved the training:

It is not fair to people to expect them to have the awareness having grown up in this culture any way.

e) Delivery of LGBT services

Key findings 17

A majority of respondents found mixed LGBT services for men and women acceptable, but for some it depended on the service and a women-only or lesbian-only service was greatly preferred. A larger majority found joint services for lesbian and bisexual women acceptable, but some noted the needs were not the same and felt it depended on the service.

We asked respondents if they would be happy to use mixed LGBT services (i.e. men and women). We also asked them if they would be happy with groups or services that were served both older lesbians and older bisexual women. The findings were:

Table 14a Mixed services

Camden and other boroughs where respondents lived

	Yes	No	Depends on the service	Not answered or unsure	Total
Mixed LGBT	14	4	6	1	25
Lesbians & bisexual women	18	1	2	4	25

This is a feasibility study for Age Concern Camden. Of Camden women interviewed (included above) the answers were:

*Table 14b Mixed services
Camden residents only (8 women)*

	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Depends on the service</i>	<i>Not answered or unsure</i>	<i>Total</i>
Mixed LGBT	3	2	2	1	8
Lesbians & bisexual women	5 ²⁵		1	2	8

Some of the women (from all boroughs in the study) who said they would be happy to use a mixed LGBT service made the point that they would rather not be faced with this choice and would prefer a lesbian service. Several commented that mixed LGBT services tend to become dominated in numbers by gay men and then fewer and fewer lesbians will use the service. It was also pointed out that the needs of older lesbians and gay men couldn't be assumed to be the same. It was important to them that there was no gender discrimination within a mixed service. Others said they would go with an open mind and see how welcome they felt. One commented that she enjoyed the contact she had newly had with older gay men, and that she went to meetings to hear another point of view, something she would not have sought in the past. One woman said that in any case via the anti-war movement she mixed more with heterosexual people than she had formerly, so the presence of men was not an issue for her. As another said: 'I would use any services that were respectful and did not marginalise'.

Some felt that it did depend very much on what the service was: certain services were thought to be too sensitive to be mixed. This included (in the opinions of at least one respondent) a bereavement group (though another woman gave this as an example of something that could be mixed), discussion of anything that related to violence or abuse, residential situations (where a women only option should exist). Women were concerned that if services were mixed they would not be able to ask for a female advice worker, or that they might be forced to accept personal care from a male assistant. (This last would, in Camden and most boroughs, be considered bad practice, and would not be acceptable to most heterosexual older women). Being able to choose a woman counsellor was important. One mentioned with appreciation women-only

opportunities like the Women's Swim session at her local pool. Social opportunities were generally preferred to be women only: 'Of course it if it is dancing I want to dance with a woman!'

The majority of respondents felt fine about older lesbian and bisexual women both using a service, but there was a feeling amongst some that it would be more attractive if it were a lesbian-specific service. Again lesbians made the point that the needs might not be the same and that it depended what service it was. If living space were ever involved there would be the issue of bisexual women's male partners, one respondent said. The married woman we interviewed said 'yes' to mixed services for lesbians and bisexual women, so long as the older lesbians did not resent her presence. She was not specifically seeking an older lesbian and bisexual group at present. Another woman, previously married and who came out in her fifties as a lesbian said she hoped the discomfort of lesbians with married women had passed. Some of our respondents were indeed uncomfortable with the inclusion of older bisexual women and would much prefer lesbian only services. One felt politically opposed to sharing resources with bisexual people, though she felt fine about sharing them with older gay men and transgender people.

Several respondents volunteered that they would not feel very comfortable with the inclusion of transgender women who identified as lesbian in older lesbian groups. Some said it would depend what kind of service it was which might include transgender women. In spite of this discomfort of a minority of respondents there are no service implications. Since the Gender Recognition Act 2004 - see <http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2004/20040007.htm> it would be in any case illegal to exclude transwomen who identified as lesbian from any lesbian group, nor would a publicly funded organisation with a commitment to good practice advocate this. This is a sensitive issue for older transwomen who are lesbian and for some older lesbians due to past conflicts on the issue, and needs to be approached with understanding and a commitment to equality.

f) A changed climate - and a continued struggle

Key finding 18

Many older lesbians and bisexual women have been pioneers in social change. In spite of frustration about the slow pace of change they have tremendous experience to share, and work they still want to do to bring about lasting improvements in the situation of women, older people and LGBT people.

Many older lesbians lamented the changed climate since the nineteen seventies. They felt that instead of progress they now saw a greatly reduced women's voluntary and community sector. Lesbian events now tended to be commercial rather than community ventures, and many are more youth-oriented and less inclusive than they use to be. Women's Centres, where they still exist, are not necessarily as inclusive of lesbians as many of them had once been: 'I once wrote to the local Women's Centre asking did they know any older lesbians locally – I got no reply!'

In the view of one respondent the effect of Section 28 had been pervasive:

Definitely the assumption out there is that you are heterosexual. The assumption is you're not gay because it is considered by kids to be the most terrible thing you can be in the whole world. It is back to the fifties as far as I am concerned.

Lesbians in the nineteen seventies tended to emphasise that being a lesbian was about far more than sexual practice and was also a response to a crisis in gender relations between men and women. This view is less often voiced now and the notion of 'political lesbianism' is unpopular in many circles. It was however an important theme for some of our respondents:

So many people think it is only about sex but that's not what being a lesbian means. Not that I don't like sex. But I will not be under the power of a man. I feel a free person being a lesbian. Fantastic!

Another woman stressed that you could not look at lesbians as being just like other older people except they happened to have same sex relationships:

We need people not being afraid to accept the idea that lesbians have needs, have parallel universes. Not that 'Oh they are old it's just that they are lesbians', that would be tokenistic. [It's] not that we are necessarily just like older straight people – [if you approached it like this] you'd be selling out lesbians really badly. Our whole attitude to life is deeply and differently coloured...

While all those we spoke to might not agree with this statement, many believed that the culture they had created as lesbian feminist women was precious and they wanted to retain and share the perspective it had brought them as they aged.

Two of our interviewees were in the Pensioners Link Lesbian Workers Group in the eighties, and they have waited a long time to see the work they started then progressed. One of these women said:

The lack of interest in services for older LGB people – sometimes I think it is because it is about *older* people. In spite of all the work that Age Concern has done on sexuality. I think it's been lost, the awareness that [some] older people have a sexual identity as lesbian gay and bisexual. It might be my perception – but when I think of the work we did at Pensioners Link, I am surprised.

She went on:

The Older Lesbian Network and the Older Feminist Network – it is wonderful they still exist but it's not that much better for older lesbians than it was when we started the Older Lesbian Network.

Our respondents have done a great deal of thinking about the situation of older lesbians, much of which they felt the mainstream world was not aware of:

[I'd like to add] how difficult it is being a lesbian, especially a single lesbian. If you are in a relationship and break up with someone, or they die. Life feels very hard. You become invisible almost. Ghettoising doesn't work, I don't always want to be with lesbians or older lesbians but I want that choice. In terms of housing it ought to be recognised how difficult it is for lesbians, and it isn't.

Another, who had had children herself, added:

I think it is harder for women who have always been lesbians. If you have children it provides 'cover'.

Those innovations older lesbians themselves have been able to bring in cannot, alone, address the issue of the unsuitability of mainstream services:

Someone in another organisation told me about two (separate) older lesbians who had come to them in desperation because they suddenly needed services (I think one had had a stroke). They were not happy with what was on offer, and in both cases their change in circumstances happened very suddenly. Existing social groups for older lesbians wouldn't really have worked for them in their situations. I don't think anything got sorted for them that was any good.

One woman felt that because the world of older services is heteronormative in its approach, lesbians were less likely to think about ageing and plan for it:

I think it is complicated. Lesbians haven't lived femininity in the same way as heterosexual women. We haven't aged in the same ways; we don't experience it in the same way. We underplay and ignore it. We don't always have the same markers [e.g. children growing up, though of course some lesbians have children]. There is a normative structure and we're not in it, you ignore it and then suddenly it is a big issue. You haven't been doing the emotional and mental work on it.

Many of our respondents are expecting the statutory and voluntary sectors to respond in ways they may not, still, be equipped to respond.

Most services should be able to provide generic services for anyone who walks in the door. I am not saying that they do. But I'd go to them expecting them to be able to deal with me.

Our interviewees welcomed this study and the intention of Age Concern Camden to consider the needs of older lesbians and bisexual women:

I am very glad Age Concern is taking the needs of LGBT people seriously and specifically that Polari is focussing on lesbian women, and hope very much that this important work will continue. I believe very strongly in the need for such projects, due to personal experience both as a service provider and user.

They are appreciative of the role of Age Concern England and hope that more local Age Concern organisations will respond, as some already have, to bring in new services and to make services LGBT-friendly:

I think Age Concern is trying to be LGB-friendly and putting a lot of effort in. I went to the Opening Doors conference. An individual worker may not be lesbian and gay friendly but the organisation has it as one of their concerns.

3. Recommendations

i) Service implications for Age Concern Camden and partners

There are many service implications that emerge from this study for Age Concern Camden and its partners. The recommendations here with some slight local adaptations will be equally relevant to other boroughs in the study and Polari is pleased that the implications of the study are likely to be shared through sub-regional processes of the Age Concern Federation.

As well as the development of good practice and good use of the consultation work being undertaken by Age Concern Camden there is a new legal climate for services. The forthcoming Commission on Equalities and Human Rights will develop new powers and duties to address discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. The Equalities Act 2006 brought in regulations that will prohibit discrimination, including indirect discrimination, in goods, facilities and services on grounds of sexual orientation.²⁶ There are also implications in the Gender Recognition Act 2004 that may not yet be fully appreciated by all services.²⁷ All services, statutory, voluntary, and commercial, that work with older people will need to undertake the following to ensure services that are sensitive and accessible to older lesbians and bisexual women (and other older LGBT people) and to increase the confidence that these populations have in services:

- a) Audit and review the training staff and volunteers receive on sexual orientation and gender identity, specifically in relation to older LGBT people, that is received by staff in all grades
- b) Create a strategy for staff and volunteer training on older people and sexual orientation, and identify trainers.
- c) Review procedures to deal with homophobic harassment by other service users
- d) Create a strategy for greater older LGBT inclusion and the development of more LGBT-friendly services. This should include new approaches to dealing with homophobic attitudes in other service users.

- e) Set up ongoing methods of consultation with older lesbians, gay men, bisexual people and transgender people in the borough, or with community organisations that are in contact with them.
- a) Review publicity to older people about services to see how inclusive this is of older LGBT people. This could be done in consultation with an older LGBT advisory group or groups (including the Older Lesbian Reference Group we propose in the next section) and/or by consulting community organisations such as Polari and others.²⁸

For Age Concern Camden and Camden Council's Promoting Independence Group in particular:

- f) Examine ways that local older people's groups and organisations ACC and the Promoting Independence Group consult with could be made aware of the issues raised by this report and by other consultation work carried out by Age Concern Camden with LGBT communities.
- g) Ensure that the Camden Primary Care Trust and the Camden and Islington Mental Health and Social Care Trust as well as Social Services teams are aware of the findings of this report about older lesbians' perceptions of health and care services.

For Camden Council's Equalities and Diversity and Legal Departments:

- h) Take immediate and urgent action, if this has not been done already, to acquaint all departments, and organisations commissioned to deliver services, of the implications of the Equality Act 2006 and its provisions for the prohibition of discrimination both direct and indirect, on grounds of sexual orientation, in goods, facilities and services.
- i) Require from all departments and sub-contractors their responses as to what steps they are taking to ensure that no such discrimination (direct or indirect) takes place in their service.

For the Council's Community Safety Department:

- j) Work with the Camden LGBT Forum, the police, the Housing Department and all landlords in the area (including private landlords) to ensure that all residents, including older people, are more aware of what steps can be taken to deal with homophobic harassment.

ii) An Older Lesbian Project in Camden

We believe that our interviews provided clear evidence that an older lesbian project would be an important and valuable initiative in the Camden area. In our view it would be effective in addressing needs that have been identified in the earlier part of this report. While not all the participants were resident in Camden, we believe that there are other older lesbians not yet contacted whose needs are likely to have much in common with those we interviewed.

a) Structure

We recommend the following structure:

- *An Older Lesbian Development Worker* (P/T) supporting
- *An Older Lesbian Reference Group* which can be consulted by Age Concern Camden, Council Departments and other service providers and steers the development of
- *An Older Lesbian Project* which includes a larger number of older lesbians (and possibly bisexual women) and undertakes a variety of activities

b) Strategy

We would recommend inviting women we have contacted, and others who are interested, to form An Older Lesbian Reference Group which will act as a steering group for developing new activities and initiatives for the whole Older Lesbian Project, and can advise Age Concern Camden and its partners. We believe from our experience that it is important that this Reference Group, as a Steering Group begins to undertake some social and/or creative activities from the outset. These activities would form the basis of the wider Older Lesbian Project. A finding from the evaluation of our own successful three and a half year project Polari In Partnership was that we might have been able to involve a larger number of older lesbians and gay men if we combined social activities with consultation and advisory functions.²⁹

c) Inclusion of Older Bisexual Women?

At this time the need for a project for, or inclusive of, older bisexual women has not been clearly established, and we would advise that this is a decision that could be made after further development work with older lesbians who become involved in the project. There was no very strong opposition to the involvement of bisexual women from Camden lesbians interviewed and it could possibly be an advantage if the project decides to be inclusive, since the London-wide Older Lesbian Network is not open to bisexuals.

d) A women-only group

The setting up of a women only group, on the same lines as the existing older gay men's group, is, we believe, likely to attract more participants than if it were a mixed group. Polari's own experience is that more older lesbians are likely to attend women only-events than mixed events, particularly when they have a social element and can allow for a focus on themes of particular relevance to lesbians. However, there are some services that Age Concern Camden may wish to offer in future which could well be inclusive of women and men. In particular ACC may be able to offer appropriate services to lesbian women in a mixed environment if the services are provided one to one and if a same gender worker or volunteer can be provided where this is desired. Such services may include for instance advice, information and advocacy, counselling, befriending and bereavement support. We believe that these are future decisions that could be made in consultation with an Older Lesbian Reference Group.

e) Recognition of the input of the respondents

The report of this feasibility study (which contains many exciting and innovative ideas from older lesbians) could offer a resource to a new group in its development of activities and initiatives that would benefit older lesbians and other LGBT people in the borough. We believe it is very important that the women who contributed these ideas, having given generously of their experience, imagination and expertise, should, if this is possible, be invited to the group whether or not they are resident in the London Borough of Camden. We hope that through ACC's co-working with neighbouring Age Concern organisations this will be possible.

ACC may wish to determine that the Older Lesbian Reference Group should involve women who are resident in the borough but that a wider Older Lesbian Project that undertakes activities and initiatives could be open to the research respondents. As agreed with respondents, at present Polari will keep their addresses and will circulate the women consulted when asked to do so by Age Concern Camden and invite those who indicated interest in future developments to contact the organisation. This was the strategy that most of our respondents preferred.

f) Potential developments for the Project

Some of the possible ways forward that the group may wish to consider may be:

- the development of new social opportunities for older lesbians (and possibly older bisexual women)
- the establishment of a means whereby the group could be consulted as a reference group
- co-working for the benefit of improved services to older lesbians and older LGBT people generally with Age Concern Camden, community centres, the Council, its partners and in general services for older people in Camden (and possibly other neighbouring boroughs, depending on the group's structure)
- co-working with the Camden LGBT Forum
- maintaining close links with the Older Lesbian Network, AGLOW, Polari, and other organisations that promote the wellbeing of older lesbians
- eventually, the possible development of working groups on the improvement of care services, future housing options and other areas of concern to older lesbians
- the possible development of service user and community input into training on the needs of older lesbians that will be carried out by training organisations

g) The Older Lesbian Development Worker

It is recommended that the Older Lesbian Development Worker post be part-time for 17- 21 hours per week, as is appropriate within ACC's general strategy for its LGBT development work. With a full time post or more hours per week more could, of course, be achieved. She should have good knowledge of the older lesbian community and the LGBT community in general and will require development skills, the ability to

facilitate groups and knowledge of older people's issues in general. The Person Specification is likely to parallel that of the existing ACC Older Gay Men's Development Worker.

It is recommended that this post be on the scale of S02 if this is appropriate within Age Concern Camden's salary structures. It is also recommended that her Job Description should include:

- The development and support of the Older Lesbian Reference Group and a wider Older Lesbian Project
- The promotion of social and other opportunities for older lesbians in the borough
- To work in partnership with ACC and its partners in the promotion of LGBT-friendly sensitive and appropriate services for older people in the borough of Camden
- Support to the Older Lesbian Reference Group and the Older Lesbian Project to develop new initiatives as are determined by the older lesbians (and possibly bisexual women) involved

h) Budget

The Older Lesbian Reference Group and Older Lesbian Project will require a budget to cover

- the salary and on costs of the Older Lesbian Development Worker
- publicity
- volunteer expenses
- outings and socials
- training for the worker and for volunteers and participants in the two groups
- transport for disabled women to certain events when this cannot be provided by community transport
- possible costs for personal assistance to promote the inclusion of disabled lesbians in events if needed
- possible carers' costs for respite so that carers may be involved
- possible costs of sign language or other interpreting if needed

We believe that these costs will be similar to that of the older gay men's project, which is already being run by Age Concern Camden, though they may be increased because of the extra activities involved in the Older

Lesbian Reference Group. ACC may wish to bid in future for extra funds for projects that are developed by the group.

iii) Some further implications of the study

Our major recommendations are given above. However many more have been suggested by this work which are important for Age Concern Camden and its partners.

The issues raised by the responses of our interviewees have led us to think in more detail about the implications of this study. In particular:

c) The provisions of the Equality Act 2006 regarding sexual orientation and goods, facilities and services

While few publicly funded services are likely to directly discriminate by denying service, they may indirectly discriminate by providing inequitable provision to LGB users compared to heterosexual users, by failing to address adequately the homophobia of other service users, or by dealing inadequately with homophobic attitudes amongst some staff.

Services will need to make their LGBT-friendliness explicit to users who may be LGB or T themselves, and to make clear to other users that homophobic and transphobic attitudes have no place. From our experience at Polari we would say the explicit mention of sexual orientation, at the front line, is not widespread in services older people use, either with staff or with users. We hope to see greater inclusiveness, not only from the provision of LGBT specific services in future, but also from changes to mainstream services. Users will also need to know that there are procedures to deal with homophobic behaviour from other users and disciplinary and complaints processes relating to staff behaviour.

We sent out information about this study of older lesbian (and also gay men's) needs, and about Age Concern's new publication *The Whole of Me*, to voluntary and statutory services in Camden that work with older people. While we were looking for research participants, we did invite and expect response from managers of services sharing their general thoughts with us. We had only one response from a mailing of over a hundred organisations and departments in Camden, which was to tell us they were passing on our circular to their members. It is possible that this silence is because the issue was perceived to lack relevance to services

that had no experience of older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals. We would like to believe that the lack of response was because services felt they dealt well with the issues already, however, we hoped to hear from them about their good practice. We were disappointed and surprised at the lack of interest of services in our study and its implications. Nobody contacted us and said they would like to know about our findings, or to be in contact with Polari or Age Concern Camden as we work to make services more inclusive.

We feel that this silence deserves further investigation. A survey of local older people's services could be undertaken on the lines of past work by Polari and by Opening Doors in Thanet, which have both been described in the section on materials. If there is good practice, it needs to be shared, and praised. If the needs of older LGBT people are ignored by many services, this needs to be addressed. It is of course important in terms of good practice and the service needs of the older LGBT population. There are also legal implications if any indirect or direct discrimination is taking place, due to the forthcoming implementation of the Equality Act (2006) in terms of its provisions on the prohibition of discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation in goods, facilities and services. It is not clear if services are aware of this forthcoming legal change.

b) The need to ensure more confidence in the LGBT-friendliness of older people's services

The provision of specific services targeted to lesbian gay and bisexual people will not deal with all the needs of this group, nor will all those who are lesbian or bisexual wish to use them. The LGBT-friendliness of all mainstream services needs to be ensured, and made explicit to potential users.

It can be hard for users to know how LGBT-friendly services are if they do not show their friendliness by deliberately making this clear in publicity. The lack of *visible* lesbian and gay friendliness of an organisation can lead to older people feeling that it would be 'too much information' to mention their sexual orientation. One respondent's ironic comment that 'straight people don't want it shoved in their faces all the time' illuminates the reluctance many older lesbians and bisexual women would feel to mention their sexual orientation in conversation.

Age Concern England's national profile on LGB issues is praised by those older lesbians who know about it. However, it remains a priority for all local AC organisations to be firmly and visibly inclusive of older

LGBT people, which gives a precedent to older people who would choose to be out in a sympathetic atmosphere. Every service that older people use needs to demonstrate clearly that it is LGBT-friendly through its publicity and public relations and become clearly seen as such by older residents. This could be done by using inclusive language, by making clear that LGB people are expected to use services, that the needs of this group have been considered and that services hope to be appropriate and sensitive to these users. It is important too that staff make the LGBT-friendly position of the service clear to other users. They should not wait until they know they have a lesbian or gay service user who is experiencing harassment. The fact that only seven out of 25 of our respondents said they would always be out to services underlines the likelihood that services may be serving older lesbians already, though unknowingly.

While some respondents expressed confidence in the equalities policies of councils, the fact that Social Services was not specifically referred to as inspiring confidence in their LGBT-friendliness was disappointing. (One social worker with good practice was mentioned; she worked for a voluntary organisation). Social workers may be lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender themselves, and indeed two of our respondents (and two other lesbian informants we spoke to in the community but who were not interviewed) were retired social workers. Many others will have excellent practice, and undoubtedly there is a general wish to offer good service to older LGBT clients. However this may not be apparent to older people. This is particularly relevant given that the Older People's Assessment and Review Teams may be the first port of call of an older lesbian whose needs have changed. She may not reveal her sexual orientation at the assessment stage, but is more likely to do so if she believes the service is friendly to lesbians.

The fact that the Promoting Independence Group in Camden's Housing Department distributed a letter to local older people appealing for participants in the study was, we believe, important and very helpful, as was an item in *Your Camden* and items on the Council's website and staff intranet. The mailing to the older people's Reference Group brought three older lesbians into the study and made transparent to all who received the letter the intention to include older lesbians gay men and bisexuals and address their needs.

The issues raised by older lesbians we interviewed need to be taken on by all agencies (commercial and voluntary sector) commissioned by Camden, and those whose services are used by older people who are self-

funding or using Direct Payments, Disabled Living Allowance or Attendance Allowance to pay for assistance. This is made clear in a recent publication by the Employers Organisation for Local Government and the Local Government Association:

Lesbian, gay and bisexual equalities must be considered not only within the authority itself, but also within the organisations from which it buys goods and services. In the eyes of the public contractors and sub-contractors are 'representatives' of the authority. It is vital that outsourced services are delivered in a way that meets the obligations of the Council.³⁰

c) Homophobic harassment and other hate crime

Our respondents showed considerable concern about the possibilities of homophobic harassment, attack and other hate crime. These anxieties should not be treated as an unrealistic 'fear of crime'.³¹ While there is a general belief amongst many well-disposed heterosexual people that homophobia is surely over, 21% of men and 13% of women surveyed by MORI in 2003 reported that they personally felt 'less positive' towards gay or lesbian people. 37% of those MORI surveyed thought that gay or lesbian people were the minority group most likely to experience prejudice and discrimination in England.³² While feeling less positive does not necessarily mean someone would harass or attack a lesbian or gay person, homophobic reactions, sadly, continue to exist in the population.

At Polari we have come to the general conclusion from our work that news of important and innovative work on homophobic crime is inadequately made available (for instance through training) even to providers of housing. This area of community safety seems to be out of the orbit of most providers of other older people's services. This needs to change.

The continuing existence of hate crime against LGB people³³ emphasises that the fears of older LGB people cannot be treated as outmoded fears that derive from the older lesbian or gay man's age and personal experience of negative attitudes in the past. This has sometimes been suggested in the literature on older LGBT people. The reasons why older lesbians gay men and bisexuals may make themselves less visible than younger LGB people are complex, but some ideas are suggested by our 25 interviewees. The risk of homophobic hate crime is one of the factors around which older lesbians gay men and bisexual people negotiate their

safety on a daily basis. It is important that this is fully understood by all who provide services to them.

Many of our respondents said they had experienced no homophobic reactions, but that people probably didn't realise they were lesbians. Acceptance, when one's sexual orientation is not known, carries the price that one may think hard about sharing details about one's friendships, activities or past. For some older lesbians this privacy may work well, while others could experience it as oppressive and a factor leading to isolation.

One of the unfortunate side effects of the invisibility of the sexual orientation of users due to uncertainties about community safety or unfriendly prejudice means that those who are lesbian, gay and bisexual are denied an opportunity for potential support and social contact with each other.

We believe that the most urgent issue to address now is the lack of information available on support to older lesbians (and all LGBT people) in the event of harassment. Even some of those who have worked in social services and housing themselves have reported feeling unsupported.

d) The strong views from users about residential care and personal assistance

While only 4.5 per cent of people aged 65 and over were resident in communal establishments in Great Britain in 2001, among women aged 75-84, 5.2 per cent were living in communal establishments. The proportion of women over 90 in this situation was very much greater at 34%.³⁴ Government policy intends this proportion to drop through greater provision of assistance within the home or in 'very sheltered' or 'extra care' units that are self-contained flats. However it remains an understandable concern for older lesbians that provision available to them may still be even less appropriate for them than for other older women.

There are many concerns, of course, in the older population in general about the quality of care older people receive, and most older people dread the loss of autonomy involved in living in a residential setting or depending on a stranger coming into one's home. However the feelings of our interviewees about residential care and personal assistance, in relation to their lives as lesbians and bisexual women, were strong. To contextualise this finding, Polari is keenly aware that concern about the

fate of lesbians (and also gay men, bisexuals and transgender people) who need to live in a residential setting has been a key issue for older LGB people ever since we were established in 1993.

The implications of the responses we received need to be addressed. Where care homes have good practice, it would be reassuring to older lesbians and bisexual women if this were communicated to them. The anxiety about residential care clearly has implications for quality of life as lesbians and bisexual women age. We would like to see care homes consulting with older LGBT people instead of ignoring the issues until the needs of a user who is prepared to discuss their sexual orientation raise it to them. Polari has anecdotal knowledge from our information work that one older LGBT person in a care home in Camden indeed felt isolated, and one of our respondents mentioned a lesbian in this situation. We have also heard of an instance of good practice. We had hoped our study might have prompted care homes to share with us their general approach, even if they had no residents wanting to take part in the consultation.

The need to address this seems particularly urgent to us because of the complete lack of response to our mailing to all the care homes operating in Camden. Age Concern England has now brought out the excellent resource *The Whole Of Me* which has been described above. This should be used to stimulate discussion of the issues relevant to older LGBT people with care homes. Care homes also need to address the implementation of the Equality Act 2006 provisions in terms of sexual orientation. We can see an important role for both Social Service Commissioners and Age Concern Camden in making this a reality.

We were told by respondents of instances of bad practice that they had heard of by personal assistants in the home. This is a major issue in terms of the impact of bad practice through inadequate diversity training: one unpleasant and homophobic experience will affect a wide circle of lesbians who hear of it on the grapevine and who then develop a greater reluctance to seek help. The implications of this for the future in terms of the likely refusal of services by older lesbians, the reduced prevention of ill health and reduced safety when a home cannot be maintained are not quantifiable.

Some women expressed a wish for lesbian personal assistants. Various lesbians and gay men that Polari has assisted through our information service have enquired about the possibility of lesbian/gay care staff. We believe that personal assistance is an area of work that justifies exemption

under the sexual orientation employment regulations (2003) on similar cultural grounds to those that allow exemption in terms of gender and ethnicity in certain posts. However from our experience we do not believe that all agencies and social services would respond helpfully to such a request. Our efforts to find such assistance for users have often been fruitless and duty social workers in several boroughs (none in the area of this study) have failed to understand the nature of the request.³⁵ We believe this aspect of user choice, and the ways it might be addressed are issues that must be addressed by social service assessment and review teams who procure care packages, by agencies supplying staff, and by those supporting recipients of Direct Payments, *before* they receive such a request.

One respondent to this study made the point that things may be easier for service users when lesbian gay and bisexual staff choose to be out themselves, but this option for staff is not one that has traditionally been discussed in older people's services. Staff have, of course, the right to privacy on this issue and it is not helpful if they are expected by management to lead on issues of sexual orientation in their workplace unless they wish to take a role. However Polari would welcome discussion with LGB staff and unions about the issues that are involved for them in their being out to clients and residents.

e) Promoting social opportunities

A strategy for the promotion of social opportunities for older lesbians in Camden could include both the creation of new opportunities for social networking for older lesbians and the promotion of existing opportunities. This could involve keeping in touch with the Older Lesbian Network and the Association of Greater London Older Women.³⁶

Promotion of social opportunities could include supportive partnership working with other organisations that provide, or want to provide older lesbian opportunities (such as the Drill Hall) and support to lesbian venues in making their facilities more accessible to older and disabled lesbians. It could also involve arranging older lesbian social gatherings in the borough in accessible venues, either in Age Concern Camden, Council property or community centres, and encouraging less formal social activity such as meet-ups for coffee in local areas. A lesbian social group organised by Age Concern Camden or other Age Concern organisations could function to link older lesbians to many opportunities; all the activities don't have to be provided by one group, and women who have met each other in one group might, for instance, attend a course

together. As it was indicated to us that black older lesbians would value a self-organised group, ways they could be supported to obtain funding for this should be examined further.

Further scoping needs to be done to estimate potential numbers for any of these activities before extensive plans are made: this could be done by setting up a small group and seeing how it expanded and what the older lesbians within it wanted to develop.

f) Possible ways to address isolation

From this study do not think that at this time befriending schemes limited to one borough for either older lesbians or for any older LGBT people would attract enough users. However we think it is crucial that isolation is addressed. While we don't believe that befriending service is an urgent need within a single borough at present, we do expect this to change in future.

We believe that at present an appropriate local response might involve a diverse strategy. It could include the linking of older lesbians who are isolated with existing groups they may wish to use such as the Older Lesbian Network. This could involve accompanying a woman to her first meeting (assuming the Age Concern worker were to be over 40 and is prepared to work on a Saturday afternoon) or putting her in touch with an older lesbian who would go with her. It could also involve intermittent telephone support to older lesbians who were unable to attend meetings or did not enjoy them. Older lesbians themselves have suggested innovative ideas to combat isolation. One of the participants at the First National Older Lesbian Conference organised by the Northern Older Lesbian Network had the idea that there should be a website like Friends ReUnited where older lesbians could link up again with friends they were no longer in touch with. If such a site were in existence, older lesbians might use it in libraries if they did not have their own Internet access. While this may not be a project for a North London group, similarly imaginative ideas could be pursued.

We also believe that much promotional work needs to be done so that older lesbians who are completely isolated become more aware of lesbian groups in the borough or nearby that they might wish to attend, and older LGBT specific initiatives. We believe that plenty of promotion needs to be done so that services they may be using already display publicity materials and know that they could refer their service users. Age Concern Camden's support to older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals needs to

become better known by local older people and by services in the borough in order for isolated lesbians to hear of it. We also believe that LGBT services that exist (as listed in our sections on existing services and models of good practice) can be assisted by organisations serving older people to promote these services to all older residents. There is scope for much more partnership between the LGBT voluntary and community sector and the sectors serving older people than exists at present. We believe it is necessary for both LGBT and older sectors to reach out to each other.

From our experience at Polari we do believe that there is currently a need for a befriending service on a London-wide basis. We have received some requests for befrienders for isolated older gay men (though none as yet for older lesbians). Polari does not train and co-ordinate volunteers as we are not direct service providers; rather we attempt to link these enquirers with mainstream befriending services who may be able to find a gay volunteer. However this has often been unsuccessful as there was no befriending service locally or it had no vacancies for new members. Though we have been in touch with lesbians who have become isolated, we have been able to put them in touch with networks such as the Older Lesbian Network and the Older Lesbian Project of AGLOW. It is likely however, as the lesbian community ages, that we will hear from older lesbians who are not able to get to meetings even when they are in wheelchair accessible venues in Central London, as OLN's is.

Polari is in discussion with Kairos in Soho (which is an LGBT community development organisation as well as a service provider) together with whom we are looking at what responses could best support older LGBT people who have become isolated. We are also talking with them about the needs they have identified for a pan-London LGBT Social Action Centre which, if it were set up in the future, would attract volunteers who could become befrienders.

g) Practical help for older lesbians

This study confirmed impressions from other work done by Polari that many older lesbians have concerns about handy-people coming into their homes and realising they are lesbians by looking at their bookcases or pictures. Older lesbians we interviewed were concerned about having to give access to the home to tradespeople who might not be LGBT-friendly or confidential. One of the ways this could be addressed would be to help women search for appropriately LGBT-friendly contractors. Lesbian and gay-friendly artisans can be found on the website [Gay to Z](#):

<http://www.gaytoz.com/bsearch.asp>

Gay to Z also provides a hard copy directory that could be made available in Camden Libraries.³⁷ For those who want a woman artisan there is also a directory of produced by Women in Manual Trades at: <http://www.wamt.org/splash>

The SAGE model described in Section 5 could be discussed further in an Older Lesbian Reference Group if one were set up in Camden or other North London boroughs.

The respondents' concerns, however, raise implications for landlords in the standards they expect from their staff and subcontractors in terms of confidentiality and good practice. We believe this should be raised with the Housing Department, with registered social landlords and other housing providers.

We note also that Camden and some nearby boroughs have invested important resources in the development of neighbourhood support for older people from local volunteers. The concerns of some of our respondents about very local visibility in terms of their sexual orientation raised to us the possibility that some might be reluctant to use neighbourhood schemes which could involve local people knowing more about them. We have no information however about the extent to which older lesbians (and also gay men, bisexuals, transgender people) are represented in the user base of Good Neighbour and similar schemes and we suggest it is an issue that these schemes might wish to consider further.

h) Advice, Information and Advocacy needs

We hope that all advice and information officers will acquire appropriate skills to support older lesbians and other LGBT people. We can also imagine a successful strategy within an organisation where one officer develops specialist knowledge in this area and can be called on when needed, though they work with the general older population the rest of the time. Such a model has existed in many Age Concern organisations in the way they provide culturally appropriate services to black and minority ethnic communities. With such a specialist officer fully aware of LGBT issues, the service could then be promoted to the older lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities. All advice and information workers, however, must be able to recognise and deal with these needs in the absence of a specialist officer.

If Age Concern's advice and information officers (and other advice and information staff) are to provide good service to older lesbians and gay men they will need a real understanding of the impact on people's lives of the social exclusion many LGBT people face. They will need a sympathetic understanding of lesbian and gay cultures and lifestyles. While services in general could not offer parity with LGB-specific services such as the Village Citizen's Advice Bureau in Manchester (see <http://www.thevillage.org.uk>) they would need a general awareness of the general provisions and implications of Civil Partnership, the law as it applies to LGB people in housing (particularly succession and joint tenancies). They would need to know about rights and discrimination in employment and goods facilities and services, and how to deal with homophobic harassment as well as discrimination.

They would need the ability to abandon any heteronormative vision that fails to see actual discrimination where it exists, and to be up to date on the regulations on same sex partnership and benefits. It would be useful to be generally aware of the regulations around immigration and same sex partnerships and about the issues that face older lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender people, particularly when they need health and care services, or when they are carers. They should understand the implications of the Gender Recognition Act. At the very least they should be able to perceive these issues when they are presented by clients (who may not be aware themselves of rights and remedies that they have) and they should know what organisations exist from whom they could acquire the relevant information. They should know what LGBT-specific services exist locally and what they have to offer.

It is, of course, important that information services to older lesbians are accessible to disabled women, in large print formats and other formats used by visually impaired women.

i) Bereavement Services

Those who are bereaved may value different kinds of support. While some may be seeking one to one counselling, others may value a helpline or a peer support group. We recommend that Age Concern Camden makes contact with London Friend's Bereavement Helpline and with PACE (which has counselling services) to explore with them the scope and capacity of the services that exist, and to discuss the needs of bereaved older LGBT people, including older lesbians and bisexual women.

j) Recognition of diversity in spiritual experience

While some older lesbians are practising Christians, Muslims and Jews, humanists, atheists or agnostics, others have found other spiritual paths, which they experience as tolerant of their sexual orientation. However these paths (for instance Buddhism, Subud, the meditational aspects of Yoga, and Paganism were mentioned to us by those we interviewed) are, in our experience, less often mentioned in diversity training for staff. Polari would like to see more inclusion of this aspect of diversity, as there are many implications in terms of older people's experience of quality of life in old age.

k) Considering dying

One respondent raised consideration of her need to plan for her funeral and burial site. In Polari's work we have found that other older lesbians and gay men have also wanted to discuss this issue and it became a major theme in a health-related event that we convened. Though we did not survey respondents on this issue, we believe that there is scope for a sensitive project supporting LGBT people on all the issues connected with future illness and dying: advance directives ('living wills'), wills, and the planning of an appropriate funeral and burial site.

l) Older lesbians and bisexual women as carers

It will be important for any initiative in Camden to be aware that some of the hidden older lesbians we were not able to reach for our study may be carers, and to design future opportunities for older lesbians with this in mind. The Alzheimer's Society Lesbian and Gay Carers Network is a good source of information and support and their newsletter and website would help a new service remain aware of carers' needs. They could, of course, offer resources to those lesbian carers who support someone with dementia: http://www.alzheimers.org.uk/Gay_Carers/index.htm

There are implications for carers in the responses we received to questions about care homes and personal assistance. The particular dread amongst lesbians of an entirely heterosexual and lesbian-unfriendly atmosphere in a care home may lead to greater stresses on carers. They may share with the partners or friends they assist a determination that a disabled lesbian should never need to use the respite services of a care home and they may not be able to access other, more lesbian-friendly

options. Doubts about the suitability of untrained and unaware workers that offer personal assistance may also cause increased stress for carers and reluctance to use these services when carers need a break.

We would recommend that Age Concern Camden consult with the Camden Carers Centre about the needs of LGBT carers and the capacity of existing services to support them.

m) Health care, including mental health care

We recommend that the views of older lesbians about health care should be passed to the Camden and Islington Mental Health Trust. The views of older lesbians using mental health care are a particular concern of Polari's, which has been funded by Bridge House Trust for a mental health development project 2006-7. This will consult with older LGBT users of mental health services. Polari hopes to raise funds for a more substantial three-year project working in partnership with service users and mental health trusts.

General concerns about the sensitivity of primary care to older lesbians need to be passed on to the Camden PCT. Links can be made here with GLADD, the Gay and Lesbian Association of Doctors and Dentists (see <http://www.gladd.org.uk/site/>) who are likely to have a view on the improvement of primary care for LGB people in general. Another important initiative that should be linked to is the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Advisory Group (SOGIAG) of the Department of Health which has a wide ranging programme, is setting up training standards for NHS workers. SOGIAG has produced a training DVD (in which Polari participated to raise the concerns of older LGBT people) and online materials. Their recent LGBT Health Summit was well attended and an on-line group takes forward the issues, as well as a structure of committees and working groups. The Department of Health website <http://www.dh.gov.uk> can be searched for 'Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Advisory Group' or try: <http://www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/EqualityAndHumanRights/SexualOrientationAndGenderIdentity/fs/en>

n) Housing

Respondents had, in two instances (this represented a couple living together) very negative experiences of their landlord, a Housing

Association. They and others shared ideas that Polari will discuss and which we think should be taken forward by housing providers together with the lesbian and LGBT communities.

We believe all social housing providers to older people and to the general population must address the issue of the needs of older LGBT people, and refer to the good practice of Accord Housing (see Models of Good Practice, Section 5xi) in reviewing all policies. Polari, Accord, Stonewall Housing, Shelter, and the North British Housing Association (see Section 5 and reports in 4ii) and have taken a lead in considering these needs of older lesbians and gay men. This work needs to be taken forward. We urge the Housing Corporation to fund an initiative to take this work further, and we recommend to Camden's Housing Department that it considers what sheltered housing provision implications there are for an ageing lesbian (and LGBT) population.

One of our respondents was of the opinion that Housing Associations 'don't have the same standards in terms of equalities as the Council'. Where attention to equalities is less developed in voluntary sector social housing, there are policy implications. Currently (2006) we have seen the setting up of more arms-length management organisations and a general tendency across London for housing to be increasingly provided to older people by Housing Associations rather than by the Council. Unless good practice in Housing Associations and other charities (in terms of equality and diversity policies and procedures to deal with homophobic harassment) uniformly keep pace with the standards of Councils, this devolution of provision away from the Councils will not serve LGBT populations well.³⁸

a) BME older lesbians and bisexual women

Camden, and other boroughs with what has been described by one of our respondents as a 'cosmopolitan' atmosphere may well expect that BME older lesbians (like other BME older people) will be more inclined to stay in the borough rather than moving out to coastal and country areas, as some white British older lesbians plan to do. One implication of this is that the needs of this group of older LGBT people are likely to become more visible in future than they are at present, and these populations need to be consulted with and planned for by inner London boroughs.

A need for more social opportunities for black older lesbians has been reported, as we mention above. We hope that this report, which Age

Concern Camden may share with other organisations, will help in flagging up this important need to funders.

p) Training

Respondents felt strongly about training. Some of them have been calling for this for over twenty years and cannot understand why it is not happening. Older LGBT people have a right to be treated with respect by people who are trained and aware, and staff deserve to be given the skills to provide excellent service. Our respondents had many ideas about training and we believe some of the very resourceful women we interviewed could offer valuable user input to staff training, either professionally or as potential users of services.

Training needs to be ongoing and to be related to practice within the workplace. General diversity training on sexual orientation is unlikely to address all the issues that are relevant to LGBT older people, it needs to be made specifically relevant to older services. Staff need opportunities to look at the way any given training is implemented in practice, and to be assured of its relevance even while they may not know if they are assisting any LGBT people. Management needs to be reviewing the success of training in terms of the knowledge and attitudes of staff, and working in partnership with older LGBT people who are prepared to be visible, whether or not they are currently service users.

The training that staff receive on sexual orientation and the needs of older LGBT people needs to be audited immediately and a strategy created. This is essential in any case, but becomes more so in terms of the Equality Act 2006. Where there is good practice it needs to be talked about, where there is a general lack of awareness in services and among staff it needs to be addressed urgently through training.

The development of training input is one of the issues that could be worked on by a future Older Lesbian Reference Group in Camden or other boroughs. Polari and the Association of Greater London Older Women (AGLOW) have developed a model of good practice in this area in which older lesbians and gay men are involved in training. Older lesbians who are part of the AGLOW Older Lesbian Performance Group perform sketches that illustrate the issues for care staff.

q) Older lesbians and bisexual women's skills and experience

The achievements of older lesbians and the large part many have played in establishing the Women's Liberation Movement in this country, with its associated campaigns, have done a great deal to improve the status of all women in the UK. Many have put the women's movement, and/or lesbian and gay rights, before their own personal future. This is not true of all older lesbians of course, and some were never involved in political activity. However many of the generation of lesbians politically active in the 1970s and 1980s have never bought their own home and have inadequate or no occupational pensions and few savings. This was in many cases a choice, but it was one made for reasons of both personal satisfaction in their political work, and altruism. There are likely to be effects on their opportunities and resources when ageing and it is important to many that their achievements and contributions are recognised. It was lesbians themselves, in community groups and organisations, who initiated work on the status and welfare of older lesbians.

Older lesbians are service users and residents who have much to offer to the development of older people's services. The effects of ageism means that the sexuality of all older people tends not to be seen. When it is, it is often constructed as problematic, or it may be treated in a sentimental way ('how sweet'), or as dirty and/or amusing. Older people's sexual and intimacy needs are generally ignored by services which affects heterosexual as well lesbian gay and bisexual people. We believe that responses to this study show the tremendous potential amongst older lesbians and bisexual women to work with policy makers and service providers, and especially with Age Concern Camden, not only to make their own aspirations a reality, but also to achieve changes in awareness and innovations in services which will extend beneficially to other older people of all sexual orientations.

4. Older lesbians: background

i) History of work on older lesbian issues

As we have made clear above, older lesbians and lesbians of all ages, have themselves, for many years, been active in looking at the issues relevant to lesbians and ageing. Focused attention has been paid, at least since the nineteen seventies, to the situation, aspirations and needs of both older lesbians and gay men by these older people themselves. Often this was in events and activities of homosexual rights campaigns (such as, in the UK, the Campaign for Homosexual Equality) and, very importantly for lesbians, within the lesbian feminist wing of the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM). The WLM in the UK, and parallel movements in other countries, though not uniformly aware of ageism, included many women who raised consciousness about ageism and the preconceptions and stereotypes that exist in the culture about older women. Many of the women raising these issues were lesbians who are now over fifty, some are now in their eighties and nineties. A key document by an American older lesbian that challenges ageism in both mainstream and lesbian communities, and whose powerful message has still not been adequately heard, is *Look Me In The Eye: Old Women, Aging and Ageism*, by Barbara Macdonald with Cynthia Rich (The Women's Press, 1984).

Awareness of the particular situation of older lesbians manifested in discussion groups and local conversations in the nineteen seventies and eighties and most of it is, sadly, undocumented, or not now available. From the nineteen eighties practitioners and researchers concerned with older people, and with LGB communities, began to organise and to publish. Much of this work was done in the United States, but initiatives also existed in the United Kingdom. In particular London Friend, the LGB charity, organised a London Older Lesbian Conference with GLC backing on March 24th 1984. Pensioners Link in London had a very active Lesbian Workers Group who contacted older lesbians and supported them to organise several conferences. Their short yet hard-hitting report from 1989 focused on lesbians in residential settings and raised awareness about the needs of older lesbians, but since the closing of Pensioners Link it has been too little known.³⁹ The Lesbian Workers Group report in 1989 led to an article in *Social Work today* by Sheila Webb.⁴⁰

Jan Bridget of the Lesbian Information Service in Calderdale has undertaken committed work to make available their report and other

important evidence of continuing older lesbian need from this time, and she has produced a well-researched Older Lesbian Resource List which is the most comprehensive we have encountered.

<http://www.lesbianinformationservice.org/>

The situation of many older lesbians (and non-sexual ‘romantic friends’) has not substantially changed from the case histories summarised by the Pensioners Link Lesbian Workers Group. One case that came to their attention is an alarming example of discrimination and cruelty from staff to older women who formed a romantic attachment within a care home. Though this report was written 17 years ago, it still has potential use in training and awareness raising. As research by Polari and Opening Doors Thanet show (see below) awareness of issues related to sexual orientation and older people varies widely amongst care staff and managers across the country.

Polari set up in 1993 with the original intention of providing sheltered housing for older lesbians and gay men. After commissioning research and consulting the older LG community, it was decided not to provide housing but rather to work strategically on all the needs of older lesbians and gay men. (This has since been expanded to include older bisexual and transgender people). The key report that led to this shift in thinking for Polari was research we commissioned: Ruth Hubbard and John Rossington’s *As We Grow Older – a study of the housing and support needs of older lesbians and gay men* (Polari) 1995.⁴¹

In 1997 Jackie Langley of the University of Brighton published the important report *Meeting the needs of older lesbians and gay men* (Health and Policy Research Centre, University of Brighton). Langley specifically raised the issue of a role for Age Concern organisations in addressing the unmet needs of this population. Age Concern England, which had already supported the production of a review of older lesbian and gay work across Europe, organised the first major national conference on older lesbian and gay needs in 2002 (which was attended by many older lesbians) and launched their Resource Pack: *Opening Doors – working with older lesbians and gay men* (Age Concern England) 2001. More resources were to follow.

A series of local and national conferences have addressed the situation of older lesbians (and also gay men and bisexuals). Age Concern’s Opening Doors conference in 2002, the first national conference on lesbian, gay and bisexual ageing (report summarised below) was followed in 2003 by

the first national older lesbian conference organised by the Northern Older Lesbian Network. A summary of this report is also below.

Many other initiatives have seen older lesbians and gay men working together, for instance in local lesbian and gay networks such as BOLGaF the Berkshire Older Lesbian and Gay Forum. Three other local projects that have involved older lesbians are described in our section on models of good practice which can be found below: these are Polari in Partnership (working in London) Grey and Gay in Dorset and Opening Doors Thanet. Gay and lesbian carers associated with the Alzheimer's Society set up a support network with a helpline.

As was acknowledged in Age Concern England's *Opening Doors* report, older lesbians do not always feel as badly affected by ageism in the lesbian community as older gay men frequently feel. This can be attributed to the strong challenge that lesbian feminists have made to traditional ways of seeing women as defined by their looks and their performance of femininity. However, many older lesbians would assert firmly that they do experience ageism from some in the younger lesbian community.

Lesbian feminist organising has contributed to the strong older lesbian networks in London, and many other parts of the country. The Northern Older Lesbian Network organised the first national lesbian conference in 2003.⁴² Yet these groups only exist in some areas, are largely unfunded and they are not able, alone, to have an impact on social policy. In some cases there are strong local links to those who work on policy. Polari consults regularly with the Older Lesbian Network in London, and works closely with the Association of Greater London Older Women's Older Lesbian Project. The older lesbian network, which meets in Birmingham, is chaired by Sue Davies who also works on policy and good practice for Accord Housing Association. She thus provides a link between older lesbians and the development of new social policy and practice related to their present and future housing and support needs.

New initiatives are being worked on by Age Concern England, Polari, and other LGBT organisations and providers of services to older people that hope eventually to offer more options to older lesbians as well as other LGBT people. Older lesbians will be consulted, involved and invited to participate to shape new projects. In spite of the support of a small group of charitable trusts for work on older lesbian, gay and bisexual issues, there is still a paucity of resources available to take this important work forward.

ii) Materials relevant to older lesbians in the UK

There has not been a great deal of work on the particular needs of older lesbians in the UK; generally their needs and situation have been considered together with those of gay men. However there is still more material than could conveniently be reviewed here. Due to reasons of space in this study, which could not include an exhaustive review, we have focused on some of the most important academic articles on older lesbians (and also gay men) that are listed in the Bibliography at Appendix ii). Except in a few cases where we feel the approach of the author is particularly relevant to this study, we have concentrated on reports of projects and initiatives that are practically oriented to work in the community with older LGBT people rather than theoretically oriented. Specialists in social work, health care, psychology and other disciplines will find it useful to consult the Bibliography where materials are divided according to theme. Articles listed in the bibliography in Appendix ii) also include some from the United States where the issues may have broad similarities, but the ways that older services are provided and funded are significantly different to the situation in the UK. The materials in this review have been arranged loosely chronologically by year of publication.

Pensioners Link Lesbian Workers Group Report, Pensioners Link, 1989

This can be found on the Lesbian Information Service Website:
<http://www.lesbianinformationservice.org/> under 'Old Lesbians'

This report details short case studies of five older lesbians living in the community and two women in care ('Lily and Norah') who were in a deeply emotional (but not necessarily sexual) relationship. These last two women, as reported to the Lesbian Workers Group (LWG) by an appalled care worker who witnessed this, were mistreated in their care home and forcibly separated at the time that one of the friends died. The LWG said:

"These case studies reveal that there are lesbians in residential care who are vulnerable and who are being abused by both workers and management because of their sexuality. They reveal the total isolation many old lesbians find themselves in when they have to live in

heterosexual environments; they reveal the desperate need for special sheltered housing for old lesbians”.

The LWG made 16 recommendations to care workers and managers in residential homes which stressed: avoiding heterosexist assumptions about older people, allowing residents a choice of gender in those offering personal assistance, the right to privacy, the need to consult residents in care about policies and their living arrangements, the rights of residents to community facilities and their own GP, the right to mix with whom they choose and invite lovers and friends into the residential home, the right to have sexual needs and desires respected and accepted, the right to privacy of rooms and belongings, the right to show one's affections to loved ones, the right to talk about one's past freely, the need to avoid assumptions and respect those who have not fitted into the usual pattern of marriage, the right to maintain sexual relationships and for partners to be able live as a couple and to look after each other in privacy, and that gay publications should be available in homes.

Suzanne Neild and Rosalind Pearson. *Women Like Us*. London: Women's Press, 1992.

This book, though now sometimes hard to obtain, is based on empathetic interviews with older lesbians who talk reflectively about their lives. It is essential reading and has not been surpassed as a resource by subsequent literature. The authors have also provided a video of the same name, originally made for Channel 4, which will soon be available on DVD and is a valuable and effective tool in training. The follow up film *Women Like That* talks to the same women about the effects that appearing on national television as older lesbians have had on their lives.

Ruth Hubbard and John Rossington *As We Grow Older – a study of the housing and support needs of older lesbians and gay men* Polari 1995

Older lesbians are equally represented with older gay men in this study commissioned by Polari. The authors reported that there was evidence that 'lesbians and gay men show great strength and adaptability as we grow older' but that the circumstances and options that they had available caused them concern and anxiety about the future. Some of those interviewed found themselves isolated and unsupported.

38 lesbians over 50 answered a questionnaire and some were interviewed. They voiced many concerns about their situation and their future in terms of housing and social care. Individual lesbians said that they felt wary of

revealing their sexual orientation in sheltered housing, some that they felt isolated or unsafe in their community, or that their needs as carers were unsupported. They had aspirations to live into older age with their relationships and lifestyle respected, but they did not feel confident that this would happen. Of the women over 70 quotations include mention of difficulties contacting other lesbians since a partner died, of having no options in care acceptable to her as all care homes were mixed, of feeling isolated in a village. The authors comment on the enforced loneliness and isolation of many older lesbians and gay men because of the lack of networks catering for them.

A major finding of this report was the lack of consideration of the needs of older lesbians and gay men within the field of older people's housing. After talking to policy makers in organisations 'it quickly became apparent there was a lack of awareness of the quality of life lesbians and gay men could expect living in specialist accommodation. The authors sent 150 questionnaires about the needs of lesbian and gay older people to home care managers. Only 19 per cent were returned and many of them were openly antagonistic'.

Hubbard and Rossington concluded that 'There is a lack of understanding amongst providers of services for older people on the issues of sexuality and the lifestyles of lesbians and gay men. This partly reflects the rejection of sexuality in older people generally.'

The authors examined a model offered by a lesbian and gay older organisation in the Netherlands, which is a useful one for local organisations in the UK and one to which we will refer later. Most of the recommendations of the report refer specifically to housing. Especially relevant to this study, however, is their conclusion that:

'Many older lesbians and gay men expressed a belief that the success of new initiatives was dependent upon the involvement of older lesbians and gay men themselves. It is also clear that the success of much of the work in Holland was achieved because of older lesbians and gay men being at the forefront, and because of access to a large constituency of older lesbians and gay men via existing networks/social groups.'

Jackie Langley *Meeting the Needs of Older Lesbians and Gay Men*
Health and Social Policy Research Centre, University of Brighton, 1997.

Jackie Langley gave profiles of four lesbians over 50 (one in her late sixties) and examined the effects of oppression on older lesbians and gay

men. She looked at different aspects of their lives including working lives, housing, financial affairs and the difficulty many expressed about getting advice.

She found that many do not know where to go for advice about income, housing or other legal matters, other than lesbian and gay solicitors and financial consultants, whose services they may not be able to afford. 'There is a need for advice agencies to become aware of the rights and problems of lesbians and gay men and in particular those that are likely to surface for older gay people. The advice needs to be freely available and agencies need to think about ways of ensuring that gay people know of its availability.'

She looked at the need to develop support services 'that enable them to go on enjoying their lives as lesbians and gay men,' and suggested a role for Age Concern. She stressed that it is only when the staff and volunteers in an organisation accept the different needs of older lesbians and gay men that they can call themselves 'gay-friendly'. Those providing services, she says, must 'recognise the oppression that they will have suffered and of which they are fearful, and ensure that at the least they do not add to it, either through the way they structure services or respond to lesbian and gay individuals. At best they need to consider the role they can play in helping liberate and empower lesbians and gay men towards the end of their lives.'

J Langley 2001 *Developing anti-oppressive empowering social work practice with older lesbian women and gay men* British Journal of Social Work 31: 917

This study examines further the ways oppression has affected the lives of older lesbians and gay and looks at the ways social work could respond to this in an anti-oppressive manner. Routine responses such as suggesting Day Care to respond to loneliness can be very inappropriate and might exacerbate rather than relieve loneliness and isolation. Questions that are routinely asked of older people when they are assessed can be extremely difficult to answer for a lesbian or gay man. Clients may not wish to declare their sexuality to social workers, who will have to find ways to validate same sex relationships without these ever being declared as sexual partnerships. The onus should not be on the older person to have to 'come out' to the social worker at a time of stress. Open questions that allow clients to describe the relationships that are, and have been, important to them are far more useful than assessment forms that rely on the filling in of boxes. The 'liberal humanist' approach of 'treating

everyone the same' exacerbates oppression. She recommends that workers need time through sensitive but compulsory training to look at their own attitudes in order to support clients and recognise their helping networks. Workers need to be able to work with local lesbian and gay organisations in order to find the support some of their clients will want. Langley draws attention to the fact (which Polari knows to be of key importance to older LGB people we have worked with) that even if staff are gay-friendly other older people using facilities may not be. She refers to the 1999 government publication *Better Care, Higher Standards* – a charter for long term care and which includes 'not discriminating against you on grounds of your...sexual orientation.' This charter, she says, provides a mandate for the development of anti-oppressive empowering practice with older lesbians and gay men.

C Duckworth, S Botcherby, M Foley *The Housing Needs of Older Lesbians and Gay Men in the North East: Research Project* North British Housing Association 1999

This study was set up to discover needs of older lesbians and gay men in the North East of England. It recommended that housing should be provided that was suitable for the particular needs of these individuals. 60% of respondents said that they would probably or definitely move from their current home to accommodation for older lesbians and gay men. It recommended that existing properties should be made physically accessible so that those who wished could stay in them. The other recommendations were that staff should be appropriately trained in LG issues, that lesbian and gay workers should be employed, and that appropriate housing information, help and advice should be provide to older lesbians and gay men.

A Turnbull Opening Doors – A Literature Review Age Concern 2002

A supplement to Age Concern's Resource Pack (listed below under resources). It demonstrates the way older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals, while present in the older community, have remained invisible because their needs have not been investigated by organisations serving older people.

Age Concern Opening Doors – to the needs of older lesbians gay men and bisexuals: Report of the One-Day Conference held in London in 2002

This first national conference on the needs of older lesbians and gay men

included a workshop on the health and wellbeing of older lesbians facilitated by Jan Bridget of the Lesbian Information Service. She stressed that the limited research that exists on older lesbians and health often focuses on women who are secure with their sexuality and have more support to respond to oppression. These women, who are easier to target and more willing to take part in research, more often report a positive ageing experience. Notes from the workshop (number 6 in this downloadable document) are available on the Age Concern website: http://www.ageconcern.co.uk/AgeConcern/Documents/Workshops_1-10.pdf

G. Kitchen *Social Care Needs of Older Gay Men and Lesbians on Merseyside* Southport, Sefton Pensioners Advocacy Centre, 2003

This study interviewed a small number of lesbians in their fifties as well as gay men. The author stressed that 'social care needs' (though this is usually taken to mean home care, day care, residential and nursing care) should also include the need for information. The areas of benefits, health and housing on which information may also be sought are important areas for older lesbians and gay men and the author stressed the role of advocacy. He emphasised that too little was currently known about the needs of older gay men and lesbians.

Brian Heaphy, Andrew Yip and Debbie Thompson: *Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Lives over 50: A report on the project 'The Social and Policy Implications of Non-heterosexual Ageing'* (2003)

The authors found that older gay men, lesbians and bisexuals can feel largely shut out from society, that they felt discriminated against by society in general, and that gay and lesbian community groups were excessively youth-orientated. Most of those questioned claimed that health and care service providers failed to address their specific needs. Dr Heaphy said: "Considerable concerns were expressed about care provision and special housing. And there was notable distrust about respect for their sexual identities and relationships."

It was also found that older lesbians and gay men, in spite of being very resourceful and creative groups, had not in the main planned for old age. Heaphy reported that 'as mothers and carers, lesbians may have had less chance of building financial security through an adequate pension and savings, though some said that their sexuality had helped them to greater security and independence.' It was also found that a large number of those surveyed, of both sexes, were more likely to be alone rather than in

a relationship the older they were. Value placed on friendships was marked, with people often describing friends as 'the most important people' in their lives, and about half viewing friends as family: "Friends are on a par with partners and family when it comes to material support in times of need, and come into their own when emotional support is required."

*Opening Doors in Thanet Equally Different – on the situation of older lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgendered people in Thanet, Kent, 2003*⁴³

The results of this study confirmed locally what Hubbard and Rossington had discovered eight years earlier with a random sampling of older people's specialist housing and care facilities. *Equally Different* was researched and written by a group of older lesbians and gay men in the Thanet area, inspired to action after the Age Concern Opening Doors Conference. They wrote to 28 sheltered units and 121 residential care and nursing homes in the area in order to survey their knowledge of and interest in older LGBT people. 57% of the sheltered units and only 9% of the care homes responded, a very significant difference in the interest shown in this area of good practice. Only 9% of the care homes, out of the 9% who responded, showed awareness they had cared for LGBT people, 54% were sure they had not. In the case of sheltered accommodation 43% said they had not had experience of LGBT residents and 31% said they had.

Furthermore, 'Only 18% of respondents from Sheltered Housing were aware that LGBT people had needs that are different from, or in addition to, the rest of the population. With regard to Residential and Nursing Homes, Care Companies and Day Centres none did.'

The authors raise many questions in this report about these and other findings and commend the positive attitudes they encountered in sheltered housing. Their recommendations covered mandatory training for staff, for equalities policies to be 'live' and fully implemented, publicity that is inclusive of older LGBT people, and appropriate indications in the publicity literature of residential accommodation when the facility is intending to be LGBT-friendly.

Northern Older Lesbian Network Report of the First National Older Lesbian Conference 11th-13th April 2003

This major conference was addressed by nationally known lesbian policy makers whose speeches are in the report, and it had a wide variety of

workshops relevant to older lesbians' needs all of which had recommendations. A session devoted to local networking groups has led to the formation of some new local networks around the country.

www.olderlesbiancommunitypages.co.uk

The recommendations most pertinent to this study are:

- The importance of visibility and mutual support and the common interests shared by many older lesbians based on sexuality.
- Services need to monitor the number of lesbians they provide for and engage in dialogue with older lesbians when evaluating the appropriateness of provisions. It is not sufficient to state that services are available to all; it should be clear from literature that services are welcoming to lesbians, gay men and bisexual people.
- Service providers and policy makers require evidence of need. Older lesbians have a wealth of evidence and need to seize opportunities to inform the mainstream...[and]... enter into a dialogue with decision-makers

Asha ter Maat *Housing for Older Lesbians* Accord Housing Association, 2004

This report is a placement study written by a Dutch student who was placed with Accord Housing Association in the West Midlands. Her placement was commissioned by Accord's Director Sara Woodall to further Accord's commitment to the needs of older lesbians and gay men. It was written with the involvement of the Gay and Lesbian Group of Accord, and had 60 responses out of 100 older lesbians contacted. The author found that while a majority of the respondents did not want to live in a community specifically for lesbians, a sizeable proportion (44.1%) did want to. Of these the majority would like to live in a loosely clustered scheme where a number of housing units were identified for lesbian women. She reviews and discusses two developing housing projects in the Netherlands, one of which (Roze Woongroep or Pink Community in Rotterdam) is intended to be for older lesbians and gay men and one (Een Vrolijke Oude Dag, or a Gay Old Age, in Amsterdam) will be for older lesbians.

Debbie Gold *Sexual Exclusion – issues and best practice in lesbian, gay and bisexual housing and homelessness* Shelter and Stonewall Housing, 2005

One part of this report discusses the housing needs of older lesbians and gay men and identifies the problems they encounter because of their invisibility within services, the discomfort many workers have when talking about LGB (lesbian gay and bisexual) issues, isolation from family and other service users and harassment from other tenants. Staff should be able to be confident they will have the support of the LA or housing provider in challenging homophobia. Several LGB clients may prefer to be placed in one scheme to combat isolation. Workers need to understand that whether or not service users are still sexually active their sexual orientation remains an important part of their identity, and they need to have a zero tolerance to verbal harassment based on sexual orientation. Publicity and resources available need to be inclusive of LGB people.

Steve Pugh, “Assessing the Cultural Needs of Older Lesbians and Gay Men: implications for practice” *Practice* Vol. 17 Number 3, 2005

Steve Pugh challenges the idea that older lesbians and gay men, who are culturally diverse (not only in the gender differences between gay men and lesbians) can be thought of as having one ‘culture’. This has been an attractive idea to some who have seen a useful precedent for older lesbians and gay men in the social work practice of assessing the cultural needs of black and minority ethnic clients. While treating older lesbians and gay men as one culture will not be helpful, it remains that a means has to be found to improve the visibility of these older people to health and care services. When older people are assessed they are usually seen within that moment when they need new services, yet individuals gain their sense of identity from the complexity of their histories. The life experiences and identities of older lesbians and gay men tend not to be seen during assessments or care practice. The necessity of repeatedly explaining oneself as lesbian or gay can be exhausting. Simply developing services that are thought to be culturally appropriate for older lesbians and gay men cannot be the answer as they will not be appropriate to all individuals. Instead practices need to change to better respect diversity, so that the needs of diverse, and individually different, lesbian and gay clients can be better understood.

This report consists of two evaluations, one internal by the Project Co-ordinator and one external by an independent consultant, of Polari's three year project 'Polari in Partnership' which worked with three local consultation groups of older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals and with local providers commissioners and policy makers. It will be helpful to those setting up comparable projects and it also reflects the concerns and issues raised by the participants in the project about their lives in the community and as service users.

There were many successes and a considerable number of local providers and LA departments became involved in thinking about lesbian gay and bisexual older people and the services they receive. Training and awareness sessions were delivered and LGB older people became involved in local consultation processes. Important co-working was established with departments and organisations committed to good practice, particularly with those who were originating their own LGBT-friendly innovation. The project was ambitious in its scope and some of the partnerships did not achieve all they set out to do, unless the partner organisations had their own strong and independent commitment to addressing LGB issues and inclusion. The external evaluator thought that many of successes of the project were due in great part to the particular staff appointed and might not always be able to be replicated if the same model was reproduced elsewhere. Variations in design might have made recruitment of participants easier, if, for instance, the consultation and strategic work of the project had been combined with social activities that would attract more participants and provide more critical mass.

The document includes the report of the final conference *In the Life* organised together with Better Government for Older People. This launched an advance copy of the evaluation report. It is further described under models of good practice below. Go to www.polari.org 'documents' to download the report *Being Taken Seriously* or write requesting it to polari@madasafish.com

iii) Resources relevant to older lesbians in the UK

Age Concern materials

Opening Doors – A Resource Pack 2002

“Practical guidance and advice on making services more welcoming and inclusive of older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals. Topics include getting to understand your client group, awareness, language and terminology, how to get started, consultation and setting up services” FREE

<http://www.ageconcern.org.uk/AgeConcern/EB6D33A870764D82931896AF798882B9.asp>

Age Concern also has three important information papers directly addressing issues around lesbian, gay and bisexual ageing. These should become familiar to everyone who works with older people:

[IS8 Planning for later life](#), [IS28 Civil Partnership](#) and [IS27 Older same-sex couples and benefits](#).

Out and Healthy is an Age Concern introductory ‘Ageing Well’ leaflet offering first-step guidance to older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals on healthier ageing. This includes where to look for specialist advice and ‘coming out’ to a GP.

The Whole of Me...Meeting the needs of older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals living in care homes and extra care housing: A resource pack for professionals by Sally Knocker for Age Concern (2006)

An excellent succinct and creative guide for staff who work in residential and extra care settings. It addresses the issues and concerns raised in studies we have documented in the sections above and has tremendous potential to help staff deliver the kind of support and care that older LGB people have been demanding for many years.

The Alzheimer’s Society Lesbian and Gay Carers Network

Choosing residential accommodation - a guide for lesbian women and gay men

http://www.alzheimers.org.uk/Gay_Carers/residentialcare.htm

The advice to carers is not only relevant to people with dementia but could be useful to anyone needing a care home or their carer. Polari would like to see this document on the hard drive or in the brief case of every social worker who works with older people.

The Lesbian Information Service Website

This has an excellent resource list on older lesbians and reproduces papers that are difficult to obtain.

<http://www.lesbianinformationservice.org/>

5. Models of Good Practice

In this section we begin with models of good practice that are likely to be directly relevant to the creation of an older lesbian project in Camden. Following this we offer examples of good practice that be helpful in suggesting initiatives that the Age Concern Older Lesbian Project, the ACC Older Gay Men's Project or those which Age Concern Camden's partners may want to set up in future. We also include other models that can guide good practice.

iv) Participative partnership projects

a) Polari in Partnership

From 2002 to 2003 Polari ran this participation project which, after scoping all the London boroughs to discover those that would offer the most helpful opportunities for co-working, chose Hackney, Kingston and Westminster. Three local advisory groups were set up with older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals to work in partnership, through Polari, with local providers and commissioners. It was staffed by a Project Co-ordinator and an Information and Resources Worker. The concerns raised by participants determined the direction of work with partnership organisations in the statutory and voluntary sectors. Participants and staff of the project were involved in a series of local initiatives, consultations, networks and working groups. Awareness of the needs of local older LGB people was greatly increased in all localities, and the project has been involved in promoting and supporting new and ongoing LGBT-friendly developments in two of the boroughs.

Concerns of the participants led to a series of three local seminars (*Being Ourselves*) on the themes of housing, hospital services (which was chosen as the aspect of health care that most concerned our participants) and independent living for disabled older people.

A final conference, *In the Life*, was organised together with Better Government for Older People to bring the findings of the project to a wider audience and offer opportunities to share other models of good practice, and the experience of older LGB people. Over 130 speakers, providers, policy makers and commissioners were brought together with older LGB participants. Older lesbians and gay men, as well as staff, spoke in plenary and workshop sessions and new ideas were explored to

achieve good practice and develop strategies for improved services and implementation of equality and diversity policy.

The evaluation report of this project, *Being Taken Seriously* has been summarised in the earlier section. Polari's website is www.polari.org

b) Grey and Gay in Dorset

From 2003 the Grey and Gay in Dorset research project, a partnership between Bournemouth University and the charity Help and Care and local older lesbian and gay people, was set up. Older lesbians and gay men have led the project with the support of a co-ordinator employed by Help and Care. They have carried out peer research with other older lesbians and gay men and they are now (Autumn 2006) in the process of sharing their findings with local providers and commissioners and with other LGBT people. Grey and Gay in Dorset, like Polari in Partnership, has run events bringing the issues to the attention of local providers and commissioners, and a major conference to launch its report is scheduled.

More information at: <http://www.helpandcare.org.uk/dda/gaygrey.html>

ii) Disability and older lesbians

In approaching the provision of services to older lesbians, particularly those who experience impairments that are related to age, it is important to learn from the Disability Movement and disabled LGBT people. One of the recommendations of the First National Older Lesbian Conference on 11-13th April 2003 was:

An understanding of the Social Model of Disability, whereby disabled people are disabled by societal attitudes rather than by physical, sensory or mental impairments is crucial when planning and providing services for older lesbians. It is also vital that older lesbians stop regarding age-related impairments in negative terms and recognise that according to the Social Model, people of all ages are disabled by society.

Older lesbians and bisexual women, and those who work with them can learn from two organisations working against discrimination experienced by LGBT people and by disabled people. The philosophy of the two groups below, some of whose executive members attended the National Older Lesbian Conference, and spoke, is firmly founded in the Social Model of Disability, for which see

<http://www.leedsinvolvement.org.uk/social.html>

a) Regard

The national organisation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered older people <http://www.regard.org.uk>⁴⁴

b) Rainbow Ripples

The Leeds Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Disabled People's Group. <http://www.leedsinvolvement.org.uk/rr.html>

iii) A research project initiated and managed by older lesbians and gay men

a) *Opening Doors in Thanet*

The lesbian and gay community group Opening Doors in Thanet research into awareness of sexual orientation and diversity in care homes and sheltered accommodation. They raised funds for publication and project expenses and two older lesbians from the group have presented their report at a variety of conferences and seminars. Their findings are summarised in their report *Equally Different* and this can be downloaded from the Polari website www.polari.org, which hosts it.

iv) Local older LGB activism, and conferences involving local providers and policy makers

a) BOLGaF, the Berkshire Older Lesbian and Gay Forum

BOLGaF “organises social events, collaborates with other Lesbian and Gay organisations in the UK; works with statutory and voluntary agencies to support older lesbians and gay men who receive their services and campaigns to end the discrimination that older lesbians and gay men face”.

In 2003 their ‘Grey and Gay’ Conference brought together local commissioners and service providers with older lesbians and gay men to address lesbian and gay ageing needs. Local statutory service organisations worked in partnership with BOLGaF to make the conference successful. It was an inspiration to Polari in Partnership in organising their series of three seminars.

a) The Scarborough and Ryedale Gay Community Network⁴⁵

SGCN organised two important conferences that enabled networking and the exchange of ideas: the Grey and Gay⁴⁶ Conference in 2003 and their 2004 conference 'Grey and Gay – With Dignity'. These also had the backing and involvement of the local statutory sector.

v) A local LGBT Centre with an active older group

The Metro Centre in Greenwich, an LGB centre in Greenwich, serving South East London, has an active 50+ group that meets once a month. The centre also works with LGB people of all ages who are living with a mental illness. .

<http://www.metrocentreonline.org/> (click on services and then 'women' to see the 50+ group, which is mixed)

vi) A training project involving, and run by, older lesbians

a) The Older Lesbian Performance Project

This project, which is part of the Association of Greater London Older Women works with older lesbians to improve practice in service providers and to raise awareness of their existence and needs. The project combines creative expression with the development of training tools. The project meets regularly and discusses stories of poor and discriminatory practice that affect older lesbians. The stories are then improvised by members of the group who are interested in performance. Other members, who do not want to act or may not wish to be 'out' in performance, contribute their ideas and give feedback on the improvisations. Instead of working with fixed scripts (with all the problems that memorising them may present) the story-lines are improvised afresh at each performance given, and the performing members who are available are able to cover different roles. Audiences are encouraged to suggest good practice and these recommendations are included in future proposals.

The project has been involved in a variety of training situations, including presentations at a Polari seminar, to other groups of older people, to the

Metropolitan Police Authority, and courses for care staff. Contact details for AGLOW are on Islington Quest's community database:

<http://www.libraries.islington.gov.uk/inform/published/90/89.html>

vii) A voluntary organisation that gave the lead to older lesbians

a) Pensioners Link

Pensioners Link worked with older lesbians in the nineteen eighties to develop a series of conferences. At a time before participation and involvement had become fashionable words in service development, the organisation was guided by progressive principles of user self-determination and was dedicated to putting older lesbians in the driving seat rather than speaking for them. The shape and programmes of its conferences were planned by older lesbians who were involved by the organisation. The members of its Lesbian Workers Group, many of whom were then in their thirties, forties and early fifties (and some of whom are now active in older lesbian groups) stimulated attention to the needs of older lesbians at this time within the women's and older people's movements. The work of Pensioners Link with older lesbians has been continued by the Association of Greater London Older Women (AGLOW) which was formed when Pensioners Link closed.

viii) An NHS modernisation project which is inclusive of the sexual orientation of older people

a) Improving the Patient Experience, Tower Hamlets PCT

This award-winning project works in the Mile End Hospital in Tower Hamlets (an older people's hospital). A series of activities arranged for inpatients at the hospital was made inclusive and LGBT-friendly, for instance by ensuring that story-telling activities avoided heteronormative assumptions. The project undertakes training on challenging ageism with NHS staff, and integrates awareness of LGB older people into consideration of the ageist exclusion of older people's sexuality. In this way it 'mainstreams' the issue of sexual orientation and older people. Contact Improving the Patient Experience care of Tower Hamlets PCT:

<http://www.thpct.nhs.uk/>

ix) Development towards a lesbian-managed information and advocacy service for older lesbians

a) The Labrys Trust

The Labrys Trust in Bradford has developed a business plan and obtained funding to deliver an information, signposting and advocacy service for older lesbians living in West and North Yorkshire. In the first two years they plan to:

- support new or existing providers to deliver lesbian- or women-only services;
- seek to influence local service providers to ensure their services are lesbian friendly;
- collate research and information about the needs of older lesbians and about groups seeking to tackle the problems;
- collate information about locally available services for older people which are lesbian or lesbian friendly;
- identify gaps in provision to inform the development of future services;
- signpost older lesbians to existing groups, advice agencies, health services, housing and support services;
- deliver a confidential intermediate service between the client (older lesbians) and the service provider.

More information available on <http://www.labrystrust.co.uk/>

x) An older women's co-housing project

a) *OWCH – The Older Women's Co-housing Project*

OWCH is 'a community of women aged 50 and over in which their skills and talents are valued, shared and developed. A living group where health and well-being are enhanced through co-operation, companionship and mutual support. A community which is self-sustaining and self-managed by its residents'.

This project, which is not specifically a lesbian initiative but may appeal to many older lesbians, involves older women from their fifties to their seventies who at present live separately but want to be rehoused together in future. They plan to share activities and be able to support each other as they age. By meeting together regularly and building community they

are working towards a shared future. The organisation Housing for Women, backed by the Housing Corporation is actively seeking a site for them in London.

More information about co-housing can be found at <http://h4w.org.uk/magazine/article1.html> and see the entry on OWCH on www.cohousing.co.uk/

xi) A pioneering Housing Association

a) Accord Housing

Accord, the Housing Association in the West Midlands has audited all its many policies for their gay-friendliness. This is a model for all organisations, not only for Housing Associations. In 2004 Accord's Director Sara Woodall commissioned a study of older lesbian housing needs by Asha ter Maat on which we report above. Sue Davies, Accord's, Training Officer, has done considerable work, not only in the development of policy and practice within her HA, but also to bring the needs of older lesbians (as well as those of older gay men) to the attention of a wider field of older services through training and presentations. She developed an innovative and sensitive solution to the dilemma of how to represent the views of a closeted older lesbian tenant interviewed for a training resource. A video was made of the interview, the woman's words were transcribed and a DVD was made with a professional actor in the older lesbian's role. Accord has been working together with Age Concern and with Polari to seek funding for a major initiative which would identify good practice in organisations working with older people, audit the gay-friendliness of residential facilities and provide certification of good practice through a 'kite mark'. To date, however, such funding has not yet been obtained. <http://www.accordha.org.uk/>

vi) An LGBT-friendly alternative to day care centres

a) Hackney Homeshare

Homeshare, which is provided by the London Borough of Hackney's Community Care Services, is a scheme where older people can enjoy day support provided by volunteers. The support is provided in a volunteer's home. While not only aimed at older LGBT people, through the supportive policies of the management who are committed to finding solutions for older LGBT people, and the recruitment of well-trained LGBT-friendly volunteers, it can offer an alternative to those older

people who would not attend a day centre but would be more comfortable in a smaller, LGBT-friendly domestic environment.

<http://www.hackney.gov.uk/w-comis-org.htm?OrgID=5702>

vii) A practical help and befriending scheme for older LGBT people

a) SAGE

In New York City the LGBT organisation SAGE <http://www.sageusa.org> has run a successful 'Friendly Visitor' service. Polari has anecdotal evidence of its success in one case: a disabled older lesbian in poor health, known to us, received excellent support from a young gay man who helped her with her pets (who were also old and in poor health) and helped her to sort out her IT problems. Having his support allowed her to maintain two very important sources of friendship in her life, her dog and cat and her older lesbian e-mail networks.

xiv) Partnership working between a LGBT and a mainstream charity

a) Stonewall Housing and Shelter

These two charities worked in partnership, appointing an officer to research the needs of LGBT people and produce a resource pack:

Sexual Exclusion: issues and best practice in lesbian, gay and bisexual housing and homelessness Shelter and Stonewall Housing 2005.

Partnerships between large charities and small LGBT organisations create possibilities that are often out of the reach of the LGBT voluntary sector and bring expertise to the mainstream organisation.

<http://www.stonewallhousing.org/home.html>

6. Conclusions

We are pleased that during a short period of time in which we conducted this feasibility study we found 25 older lesbians and bisexual women who were keen to respond to Age Concern Camden's initiative. Polari hopes the study will be a useful piece of local consultation and will stimulate more local work in partnership with older lesbians and bisexual women in the community.

The far ranging concerns of the older lesbians and bisexual woman we interviewed led to this report approaching far more issues than we had anticipated, or indeed than Age Concern Camden alone has the capacity or powers to address. However, we believe that through partnership working many of the important issues raised here can be addressed.

Older lesbians and bisexual women are diverse, and as Steve Pugh has argued (see Section 4) cannot be understood as sharing one cohesive 'culture'. One project could never address all their varied needs, and like all other service-users, they need to be seen by services in a person-centred way. All services need to serve well those older lesbians who might never become involved in a Camden Older Lesbian Project, as well as those who would. It is crucial that all services for older people accept that have older lesbian and bisexual service users already, whether they are aware of this or not. Services need to engage in dialogue with those older lesbians who are prepared to be visible as well as listening to the needs that existing service users express. That this dialogue is long overdue was demonstrated to us by the pessimism we found in most of our interviewees about the lack of awareness they believe at present to exist amongst those who organise facilities for older people.

We valued this opportunity to consult with older lesbians and bisexual women, and to consider the implications of our findings, which we think are significant. It has illuminated Polari's own work and, we hope, will lead to more partnership working between older lesbians and bisexual women and other LGBT people, the LGBT voluntary and community sectors, and Age Concern organisations in the future.

We are grateful to Age Concern Camden, Camden Council and the Local Area Agreement that enabled this study. We particularly value the honesty, creative imagination and expertise of the women we interviewed and hope that the time they gave will be repaid, not only in Camden, but in the areas where they all live, and will benefit older lesbians and bisexual women throughout the UK.

¹ Hackney, Westminster and Kingston which Polari worked with in the Polari In Partnership Project 2002-2005. Report *Being Taking Seriously* c/o Polari website www.polari.org

² See details in Section 4 of this report.

³ Being undertaken by Kairos in Soho

⁴ In Polari's experience it is very difficult to recruit a larger number of older lesbians/gay men of this age group in such a short time span. However, as well as these 11 women, 2 more interested but were not eventually interviewed because of holidays and/or illness.

⁵ Some women interested were not able to be interviewed because of illness, the disruption in women's lives occasioned by the very hot weather in July 2006, and the difficulty of holidays intervening once dates had to be postponed. Similar problems prevented us being able to fix dates for the two planned focus groups, many were wisely reluctant to travel on the hottest days.

⁶ One of these BME women was invited to participate in spite of the fact she is resident in another local authority which is neither in North London nor in boroughs adjacent to Camden. She did however previously live in North London, including in Camden, and she knows the borough well. In Polari's experience working at a local level we have sometimes been unable to recruit an older LGB person from a particular section of the BME community, but have consulted with BME LGBT organisations and invited views from someone not resident in the area for greater inclusivity.

⁷ Though this respondent defined herself as queer rather than bisexual, we have used the better known (and for some better accepted) term in the title of the study as we had sought respondents who were lesbian and bisexual. This is acceptable to the woman interviewed.

⁸ For discussion and analysis of this see 'The Epistemology of the Closet' Sedgwick, Eve Kosovsky (1993) in Abelove, Henry, Barale, Michele Aina, Halperin, David M *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* Routledge (London)

⁹ The too easy belief that lesbians are likely to be themselves antisocial troublemakers and 'perpetrators' has been anecdotally supported by accounts Polari has heard in other situations. This aspect of anti-lesbian prejudice is referred to in community research undertaken in Manchester: see Ros Brett, *A Brief Report of the Findings from the 'Snapshot' Survey of Lesbian Experiences of Crime and Harassment: Manchester 1998*, Greater Manchester Lesbian & Gay Policing Initiative, 1998 and is also contextualised in a report from Galop: *Getting Lesbians Onto the Agenda: Lesbians, Lesbian-Hating Violence and the Police*, Galop 1997.

¹⁰ Indeed Polari has anecdotal experience from our work 2003-5 in Polari in Partnership of concern in one case that a local Neighbourhood Watch group did contain people with homophobic attitudes.

¹¹ Includes 2 workers in Camden. The other Camden worker answered in terms of her borough of residence.

¹² Includes one worker from Camden who answered in terms of borough of residence.

¹³ This is a speculative figure based on the 6% figure used by the Department of Trade and Industry in assessing the numbers likely to want civil partnership. Many people believe it is a considerable underestimate, and certainly it could be adjusted upward because many lesbians move to London from other parts of the country. A possible downward adjustment could also be made. It could be assumed that because of the suppression of women's autonomous sexuality and the social and economic

pressure on women to marry during most of the twentieth century, many older women who might have lived as lesbians never had this chance and have not developed this identity for themselves.

¹⁴ Staff have, of course, the right to privacy on this issue and it is not helpful if they are expected by management to lead on issues of sexual orientation in their workplace unless they wish to take a role.

¹⁵ The author of the report has not read this book. Reviews make clear that it is a powerful book about the mistreatment of a retired school teacher in a home that has affected many caregivers and medical staff, particularly in the US. It is not clear from reviews whether May Sarton specifically states that the protagonist is a lesbian.

¹⁶ A note on terminology is appropriate here. Polari is keenly aware of the criticisms of this use of 'care' when personal assistance for independent living is meant. These have been expressed very cogently by the Disability Movement. However we have chosen, reluctantly, sometimes to use the word 'care' inappropriately in this report because this is how this needed assistance for independent living is described by many services. Attempts to avoid using it inappropriately often cause confusion when interviewing respondents. Older people who use personal assistance, or who know older people who do, frequently use the term 'care' as it is used by services.

¹⁷ Includes 2 workers in Camden, the other answered for her borough of residence

¹⁸ Includes 3 workers in Camden who answered with Camden in mind.

¹⁹ This may be because healthy living activities for gay men have been sponsored by HIV-prevention funding. Lesbians, with their lower sexual health risks, have seldom been seen as a group that needs to be targeted, though they also have healthy living needs and risks.

²⁰ Age Concern Wandsworth is currently offering a lesbian, gay and bisexual befriending service and Age Concern Camden will undoubtedly refer to their experience.

²¹ Includes 3 women who work in Camden and answered with Camden in mind.

²² The Gateways Club has indeed closed. Other lesbian clubs and bars that exist such as the Candy Bar cater mainly to a young audience. The club Southopia (now the Chocolate Lounge) is older-friendly but distant, at the Elephant and Castle, and the Glass Bar in Euston, while older-friendly is not disabled accessible.

²³ Includes 3 workers in Camden

²⁴ Includes 3 workers in Camden

²⁵ One said not *instead* of a lesbian-only service

²⁶ For the provisions of this see <http://www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk/lgbt/orientation.htm> The legislation is scheduled to be introduced in April 2007.

²⁷ <http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2004/20040007.htm>

²⁸ There will be some resource implications as community organisations such as Polari, Press for Change or the Gender Trust are unlikely to be able to dedicate time to review literature and advise without a fee.

²⁹ 'Being Taken Seriously: The Polari in Partnership Project – promoting change for older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals' by Peter Davies and Lindsay River, Polari, 2006, available from Polari www.polari.org and polari@madasafish.com

³⁰ Employers' Organisation for Local Government [EO] and Local Government Association [LGA], in collaboration with Stonewall, UNISON and the Association of London Government, *Sexuality – the*

new agenda: A guide for local authorities on engaging with lesbian, gay and bisexual communities, EO and LGA, 2003

³¹ In Polari's work with advisory groups of older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals 2002-5 we became very much aware that while certain workers might be trusted and the physical threat presented by a group of other older people might seem to be slight, the implications of gossip about one's sexual orientation from other users were that this could be spread in a locality to those who were hostile.

³² http://www.stonewall.org.uk/documents/long_summary_no_logo.doc

³³ See Stonewall at http://www.stonewall.org.uk/information_bank/violent_hate_crime/default.asp#4 which says: "[Queer Bashing](#), Stonewall's 1995 study of violence against lesbians and gay men in Britain, found that one in three gay men and one in four lesbians had experienced at least one violent attack during 1990-1995. Because of fear of becoming the victim of homophobic violence, 65% of respondents always or sometimes avoided telling people they were gay, and 59% of respondents always or sometimes tried to avoid looking obviously gay." See also on same webpage [Breaking the Chain of Hate](#), the National Advisory Group's 1999 national survey examining levels of homophobic crime and community confidence towards the police service, confirmed these statistics: 66% of 2,500 respondents stated that they had been a victim of a homophobic incident only 18% of all homophobic incidents were reported. 70% were fearful of reporting future homophobic incidents.

³⁴ None of the general documents giving statistics about older people that we were able to access from National Statistics on line, the Association of London Government, Better Government for Older People or Age Concern London estimated the proportion of older people who are lesbian, gay or bisexual.

³⁵ In one case we were simply sent a fax with the names and addresses of all the HIV organisations in the area, though the service user in question was not HIV positive.

³⁶ Both organisations are user led and have entry ages (of forty for the OLN and fifty for AGLOW) for those attending meetings. It is important to be aware that the Older Lesbian Network has no staff, no office and no telephone, and the best means of maintaining connection might be through a member of the Older Lesbian Reference Group who attended OLN.

³⁷ Polari has already arranged this in Hackney due to concerns about confidentiality of artisans which came from our advisory group in that area.

³⁸ The quotation on recommended good practice at the top of page 61 in this report is relevant here.

³⁹ For *Pensioners Link Lesbian Workers Group Report On Old Lesbians* 1989, see the Lesbian Information Service run by Jan Bridget from Calderdale: <http://www.lesbianinformationservice.org/> Also Older Lesbian Network 'Report from the Older Lesbians Conference, March 24, 1984.' Older Lesbian Network, London.

⁴⁰ Sheila Webb 'Old Lesbians: Out and Proud', in *Social Work Today*, 20 (34), pp 20-21

⁴¹ This report can be downloaded from the Polari website www.polari.org under 'documents'

⁴² Northern Older Lesbian Network, *First National Older Lesbian Conference 11th-13th April 2003: Report*, www.olderlesbiancommunitypages.co.uk

⁴³ This can be downloaded from the Polari website which hosts the report: www.polari.org

⁴⁴ This link does not work from the soft copy of the document but can be pasted into a browser

⁴⁵ Polari was sorry to note that SGCN has recently (June 2006) dissolved as new trustees were not forthcoming to take forward their work.

⁴⁶ Grey and Gay is a theme title rather than the name of an organisation, it has been used by three different local organisations

7. Appendices

APPENDIX 7i) Brief from Age Concern Camden

Age Concern Camden Research into the Needs of Older Lesbians in Camden

1. Introduction

Age Concern Camden (ACC) is in the process of researching and developing a first stage application to the Big Lottery Fund's Reaching Communities grant programme. This major bid will be focused upon a package to identify needs and improve services for Camden's LGBT older community. It is envisaged that the project will be for a period of three years commencing in April 2007. Funding required for on-going work with the LGBT community will be built into the lottery application for the course of the three years. ACC is also engaged in discussions with neighbouring Age Concerns exploring potential sub-regional approaches.

A successful bid to Camden's Local Area Agreement (LAA) commissioning process has provided ACC with funds to conduct research into the needs of older lesbians resident in the borough in order to support the potential lottery application. LAA funds have also been provided to continue to support the development of Age Concern Camden's innovative Older Gay Men's Support project. This successful initiative commenced in September 2005 and now has more than 40 older gay men regularly attending meetings, making enquiries, finding out information about the needs of their peer group and services available.

ACC is seeking a proposal from suitably experienced consultants or organisations in accordance with the following brief.

2. Brief

The aim of the consultancy is to conduct a feasibility study into the needs of older lesbians in Camden and to explore how ACC and its partners might address identified needs.

The successful consultant will be required to:

- undertake community based research to identify existing groups in Camden and neighbouring boroughs in contact with older lesbians particularly the City of London

- identify existing services or opportunities specifically targeting older lesbians
- develop evaluation tools and interview, where possible, older lesbians individually or in a group setting to discuss un-met needs and concerns in relation to ageing
- conduct desk research to review existing quantitative and qualitative findings at a local, regional and national level
- identify and assess models of successful practice elsewhere
- determine the feasibility of establishing a social group for older lesbians which would also act as a steering group / reference point in supporting future work and prioritising needs
- outline the core aspects (e.g. partners, staff hours required, project costs) of a workable project which will address identified needs
- liaise with the worker supporting the older gay men's project to share learning and experience
- produce a contact list of any groups or organisations identified as working with Camden's older bisexual and transgender communities
- produce a final report with recommendations outlining potential service gaps and opportunities to improve the quality of life of older lesbians in the borough

3. Resources and Timescale

The total budget available (inclusive of VAT and all additional costs) is £6,000 and it is anticipated that the work will commence towards the end of June, 2006 and will be completed over a six-week period.

4. Application Process

Proposals from interested individuals or organisations should be submitted no later than **5.00pm on Wednesday, 31st May**. Candidates selected for interview will be notified before Friday, 2nd June and interviews will take place on Wednesday 7 of June. The successful candidate will be expected to commence the work no later than the end of June.

Proposals should be no longer than 5 sides of A4 and should address the following areas:

- Project interpretation
- Approach and research methodology
- Timescale for each element of research
- Proposed content and presentation of final report
- Relevant experience and consultant profile
- Employment status
- Two referees

APPENDIX 7ii)

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been documented by Jan Bridget at Lesbian Information Services:

<http://www.lesbianinformationservice.org/oldrl.htm>

Many more are available from the Old Lesbians Organizing for Change
Website see http://www.oloc.org/reading_list.html

Videos

There are two British films on video, made originally for Channel 4 in the
nineteen nineties, that have not been surpassed in terms of introducing older
lesbians and making space for them to speak for themselves. Though made in
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APPENDIX 7iii)

Lesbian and LGBT (and lesbian-friendly) organisations that may be in touch with older lesbians in Camden

All the organisations listed in Appendix 7v) should be added to this list, their websites are given for contacts. Local venues and businesses (e.g. Glass Bar, First Out, Black Cap, Gay's the Word in Camden) in particular should be circulated with literature, as should the LGBT community organisations and initiatives we list. So also should the Lesbian and Gay Film Festival which is organised annually in the spring at the National Film Theatre; many older lesbians attend this. <http://www.llgff.org.uk/>

Lesbian messageboards can be found on the net: in particular *Gingerbeer*, *Pink Sofa*, *Diva* messageboards and *Butch*, *Femme*, *Transguy*, and publicity can be posted in their relevant section. Adverts and listings should be placed in *DIVA*, the *Pink Paper* and other publications read by older lesbians and bisexual women.

The organisations listed below are either in Camden, in adjacent boroughs, in London, in the South East, or in some cases national. To find out their contact details, websites in many cases and more about their activities and area of operation and to update, please consult the London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard's database Queery: <http://www.queery.org.uk>

Alzheimers Society L&G Network
Armed Forces Lesbian and Gay Association
AGLOW Lesbian Drama Group
BLUK (Black Lesbians UK)
Broken Rainbow
Brothers and Sisters
Dahling for Deaf and Hearing Lesbians
Dykes on Bikes
FFLAG – Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gay Men
FILEF – Lesbian and Bisexual Group (Italian community, Clerkenwell)
GALOP (Gay and Lesbian Police Monitoring Group)
Gay Authors Workshop
Gay Conservatives – TORCH
Gay Police Association
Gemma – Lesbians With/Without Disabilities
GLADD – Gay and Lesbian Association of Doctors and Dentists

Green Party LGBT Group
Hall-Carpenter Archives
Hampstead Counselling Service
Hiking Dykes
Kairos in Soho Lesbian Group
Kenric
KISS at Naz Project London (Asian Lesbian Group)
LAGCAR (Lesbian and Gay Coalition Against Racism)
Lesbian & Gay Board games Group (based in Camden)
LGBT History Month (contacts)
LGSO (London Gay Symphony Orchestra)
London Bisexual Women's Group
London Friend
London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard
London Hiking Dykes
Maya Centre Islington (Counselling)
Metro Centre Greenwich (has some N London members)
Older Lesbian Network (SE, meets in Camden)
Older Feminist Network
Outcome – N London LGB Mental Health Drop In
Outsiders Club and LGBT Network
OWCH (Older Women's Co-housing)
PACE Lesbian and Gay Wellbeing
People First (based in Camden)
Pink Singers
Pink Therapy
Polari
Queer Writers and Poets
Queeruption and Queer Mutiny
Regard
Rights of Women
Rubber Medusas Women's Bridge Club
SEGAL – Supporting Elder Lesbians and Gays
Sistahood (Black professional lesbians, London)
Sisterhood of Karn (lesbian sci-fi fans, meets central London)
Sola (Survivors of Lesbian Partner Abuse)
SM Dykes South-East
Stonewall
Stonewall Housing
Turning Point
UK Lesbian & Gay Immigration Group
Unison LGBT members
Vegetarian and Vegan Gay Group
Vigour – Visually Impaired Gay

Walk on the Wild Side – gay women walking
Wise Thoughts/Gaywise
Women 4 Women
Women and Health
Women’s Therapy Centre

Faith related Groups – details can be found on the Queery database :
<http://www.queery.org.uk>

Baptist Churches in Camden and Bloomsbury
Blessed Sacrament RC Church, Euston
Buddhist/Meditation Group, c/o Kairos In Soho
Changing Attitude (network of Anglican groups)
Evangelical Fellowship for Lesbian and Gay Christians (based in Islington)
God’s Friends, London
Friends House, Euston
Imaan (Muslim LGBT)
Jewish Lesbian and Gay Group
Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement
Metropolitan Community Church in Camden (meets at Trinity URC)
Queer Pagan Camp and e-list - also see Yahoo Groups
Safra (Muslim Background lesbians)
St Anne’s Soho

APPENDIX 7 iv¹

Older lesbian and bisexual women in Camden Consultation

Number (office use)

This consultation is being carried out by Polari, a lesbian gay and bisexual organisation, for Age Concern Camden. No identifying information from participants will be shared with Age Concern Camden unless you ask us to pass on your contact details to them.

Later this year, Age Concern Camden is planning to approach the National Lottery for funds to develop services and support work for older gay men, lesbians and bisexuals in Camden. **Your responses will be treated in strict confidence. Many thanks for your help.**

The following questions were designed for residents in Camden to inform Age Concern Camden. However if you live in another borough Age Concern Camden will share appropriate information in a confidential manner (without identifying you) with neighbouring Age Concerns.

1. What borough do you live in?

2. Do you go to any groups or events or venues for older lesbians and or bisexual women?

3. Are you aware of any other services in your borough for older lesbians or bisexual women? Please tick one box

Yes

No

¹ Except in two cases this evaluation tool was used by the researcher on the telephone or face to face, rather than being sent out

If yes, can you please provide the name of the service / group and any contact name or details you have.

4. Do you use any of your Council's general services for older people?
Please tick one box

Yes

No

If yes, can you please provide the name of the service(s) below:

5. If you answered yes to question 4 would you be able to comment on whether your Council services for all older people that you have used are LGBT friendly? If you answered no please go to the next question. Please tick one box

Yes

No

Please use the space below to provide further information or a reason for answering yes or no.

6. Do you use any of your borough's voluntary sector general services for older people (or other parallel services)? Please tick one box

Yes

No

If yes, can you please provide the name of the service(s) below:

7. If you answered yes to question 6 would you be able to comment on whether the voluntary services for older people and others in your borough that you have used are LGBT friendly? If you answered no to question 15 please go to the next question. Please tick one box

Yes

No

Please use the space below to provide further information or a reason for answering yes or no.

8. If you use general services for older people in the borough are you out to the staff or volunteers? Please tick one box

Yes

No

Sometimes

9. Have you ever experienced homophobic harassment when attending or using services for older people in the borough? Or other services? Please tick one box

Yes

No

If you answered yes can you please provide more information below:

10. Do you think a residential care home in your borough would respond to your needs as an older LGBT person? Please tick one box

Yes

No

Please use the space below to provide further information or a reason for answering yes or no.

11. If you needed someone to offer you personal assistance (sometimes called a care worker, a carer, a home carer) from your Council, are you confident that they would be competent in dealing with the issues of an older LGBT person? Please tick one box

Yes

No

Please use the space below to provide further information or a reason for answering yes or no.

12. As an older member of the LGBT community what do you think you need from services delivered by your council and your borough's Voluntary Sector? Or what do you think other older LGBT members of the community need? Or do you think you or they would need in future? Please tick as many boxes as appropriate:

- | | <u>Now</u> | <u>In future</u> |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| a) more opportunities for older lesbians/bi women to meet socially | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b) a befriending service for older L/B women | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c) practical help for older L/B women | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

d) specific advice and information services for older lesbians
/bi women

e) more staff training and awareness raising in relation to sexuality
for staff and volunteers working with older people

f) support with issues relating to bereavement for LGBT people

g) other service provision specifically for older lesbians and/bi women

please specify _____

13. Would you happy to use services which are

• Mixed LGBT (men and women)

• Mixed lesbian/bisexual women

14. Are there any circumstances related to you being a lesbian or bisexual woman that affect the way you do or might use any services and facilities in your borough?

Please use the space below (or the reverse of this sheet) to provide further information you feel may be of use:

Many thanks for taking the time to respond to us – your responses will be essential in order to develop a project that will most appropriately meet the needs of older lesbians and bisexual women in Camden and surrounding boroughs.

APPENDIX 7v)

Existing services and opportunities for older lesbians and bisexual women

The following details describe services and opportunities available to older lesbians (and in some cases to bisexual women) in the Camden area.

• **The Older Lesbian Network**

The OLN was set up in 1984 by older lesbians to provide a safe space for older lesbians to meet. In 2004 it celebrated its many achievements during twenty years. It meets in Camden and gives no geographical restrictions for membership. Details of venue and times are not published but must be obtained from OLN by lesbians over forty wishing to participate c/o Voluntary Action Camden:

OLN c/o VAC
295-299 Kentish Town Road
LONDON NW5 2TJ

OLN provides an informative newsletter monthly to its members including news of activities of interest to older lesbians. The newsletter is not available to non-members.

OLN's self description includes the following:

Age 40+ Lesbians (female born) meet monthly for socialising, discussion (based on feminist structure), information-sharing and fun.

- Our venue is accessible to women using wheelchairs and women of all backgrounds, religions, cultures and physical abilities are welcome.
- Organised by a rotating volunteer collective.
- Open to all Lesbians who are 40+. (We are not an appropriate organisation for transsexuals)
- We meet every 3rd Saturday 12:30-5:30.
- Many women have a feminist perspective and certainly an idea of putting women and women's interests first.

It should be appreciated that OLN has only a postal contact at present and correspondence is picked up monthly from VAC. Therefore information to the Network should be sent in good time.

<http://www.womeninlondon.org.uk/oln.htm>

OLN is also listed on the Camden Council community website, Cindex :

<http://cindex.camden.gov.uk/cgi/Search.cgi>

To be available in future:

- **The Drill Hall older lesbian activities**

The community arts venue The Drill Hall proposes to offer activities for older lesbians in the near future. Contact Julie Parker at:
<http://www.drillhall.co.uk/>

The Drill Hall is accessible to wheelchair users and others with mobility impairments.

In an adjacent borough, and inclusive of Camden older lesbians is:

- **AGLOW Older Lesbian Performance Project**

This project of the Association of Greater London Older Women meets in Islington (Manor Gardens N7) in a wheelchair accessible building. AGLOW serves older women from all Greater London Boroughs and on occasion it will arrange meetings in Camden. AGLOW has always been inclusive of older lesbians and has an Older Lesbian Worker. Older lesbians are members of its Management Committee. The Chair of AGLOW has contributed strongly to the Polari in Partnership Project. A description of the Older Lesbian Performance Project has been given in the Models of Good Practice.

Contact details for AGLOW are on Islington Quest's community database:
<http://www.libraries.islington.gov.uk/inform/published/90/89.html>

The following mixed LGBT groups exist in Camden:

- **Rainbow Seniors Forum**

This independent and autonomous group of older lesbians and gay men (as yet unlaunched) is at present working as a Steering Group to form a pan-London Forum of Older Lesbians, Gay Men, Bisexual and Transgender People. It aims to provide a forum for discussion and campaigning to promote the inclusion of older LGBT people and to work for their wellbeing on many levels. It meets at the Association of Charitable Foundations in Euston (partially accessible, it is ramped and with disabled toilets but the main lift is small for some wheelchairs, users are offered the larger service lift if this is acceptable to them) and its development is supported by Polari. It is seeking more older lesbians for its steering group, and also to recruit older bisexual and transgender people. It is in the process of applying for

charitable status and funding. It plans to launch around the time of Pride 2007 (June 2007).

For more information, the aims of the Forum, contact Lindsay River at Polari on 020 7255 4480 www.polari.org

• **Camden LGBT Forum**

Camden Lesbian Gay Bisexual & Transgender Forum is a charity that aims to improve Camden for LGBT people in the area.

The Forum includes older lesbians and gay men in its membership and promotes the wellbeing of older lesbians in its work. It has provided support to older lesbians who experience homophobic harassment.

The aims of the Forum can be found on its website: <http://www.camdenlgbtforum.org.uk/>

The Forum undertakes a wide variety of activities, which are described on the site. Particular services and opportunities relevant to older lesbians include:

A monthly forum open to all

A monthly outreach evening

OutTakes, a project which aims to record the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in the area.

Out in Camden, an LGBT awareness day, in partnership with Camden's Equalities Unit and Community Safety Teams.

Reporting of hate crime against LGBT people. It provides a method of reporting crime without involving the police; reports can be passed on anonymously if the person wishes this.

Support with housing problems and two monthly housing clinics in Holborn and Kentish Town

A survey of local LGBT needs

The Forum provides a regular newsletter.

Other opportunities for lesbians in Camden and nearby that may interest older lesbians include the following below. It should be noted that the venues may not all be accessible or physically comfortable for older women, and details

must be sought from the organisations, and that an older lesbian may perhaps find herself the oldest woman present.

- **Gay's the Word Lesbian Discussion Group**

Gay's the Word Bookshop hosts a weekly Lesbian Discussion Group at the bookshop in Marchmont Street WC1.

<http://freespace.virgin.net/gays.theword/>

- **Kairos in Soho - Women's Voice**

The LGBT community organisation Kairos in Soho promotes the health and wellbeing of the LGBT community. It runs a weekly women's discussion group and offer other groups that may be of interest including Buddhist Meditation and a Sunday after noon walking tour of Lesbian and Gay Soho.

<http://www.kairosinsoho.org.uk/>

- **London Friend**

London Friend, based in the Caledonian Road runs two women's groups, Changes (with a focus on coming out) and Nextep, a lesbian social group. It also runs a LGBT Bereavement Project and a general helpline.

<http://www.londonfriend.org.uk/>

- **The Glass Bar**

This friendly member's women's bar in Euston hosts three book groups (one for black women) and a Bisexual Women's Group and may develop other events. Find the Glass Bar on the website of its sister bar in South London, Southopia:

http://www.southopia.com/events_glassbar.html

- **First Out**

This café near Tottenham Court Road tube is a friendly venue used by some older lesbians. It is an excellent venue at which to leave leaflets about older lesbian activities.

<http://www.firstoutcafebar.com/>

- **The Mary Ward Centre Lesbian Creative Writing Course**

The Mary Ward Centre is currently (autumn 2006) offering a lesbian creative writing course taught by an older lesbian.

<http://www.marywardcentre.ac.uk/MaryWardCentreProspectus06-07.pdf>

- **Kenric**

Kenric is the largest and longest established national organisation offering a social network to lesbians throughout the United Kingdom. Kenric is not based in Camden and is targeted to lesbians of all ages, however many older lesbians are involved, some in the Camden area. There is a membership fee and details of events are not available to non-members.

<http://www.kenric.org.uk>

- **Daytime Dykes**

“Daytime Dykes is a lesbian group which meets on the 2nd & 4th Wednesday afternoons of each month, usually at 2.30pm. We spend a few hours together going out and about, then complete the afternoon with a visit to a nearby pub for drinks and socialising. DDs is particularly popular with older lesbians, but all ages from 16 upwards are welcome.”

<http://www.gaytoz.com/search01.asp?line=16171>

Other organisations, not necessarily meeting in or near Camden but of interest to BME older lesbians are:

- **Kiss**

KISS is a social group made up of women who identify either as lesbian, bisexual or queer and are of South Asian or Middle Eastern or North African descent.

<http://www.planetkiss.org.uk/about.html>

- **BLUK**

This online group provides a portal to a variety of events and support for Black lesbians

<http://www.bluk.org.uk/>

For other older lesbians, of any background, with access to the web:

- **Ukolderlesbiansonline (UKOL)**

UKOL is a friendly email discussion and support list can be found on yahoo groups. Contact <http://groups.yahoo.com/>

And a site for lesbians of all ages:

- **Gingerbeer**

The website Gingerbeer provides ways to link up with other lesbians and bisexual women who share interests. While the vast majority of women using Gingerbeer are under 60, it provides a wealth of information and interest.

<http://gingerbeer.co.uk>

One women's venue in LB Camden is to be noted:

- **Kenwood Ladies Pond**

Though not a lesbian venue, many lesbians, including older lesbians, swim, and socialise, at the outdoor Ladies Pond on Hampstead Heath. The Ladies Pond can be found on the A-Z near to Kenwood House and the contact for the Kenwood Ladies Pond Association (from the Camden Council website) is: janeshal@globalnet.co.uk

Some organisations that offer support of varying kinds, including to older lesbians and bisexual women, are:

- **The LGBT Bereavement Project**

The Lesbian and Gay Bereavement Project has worked for many years offering volunteer support on a helpline to lesbians and gay men who have lost a partner. The service, which now serves the wider LGBT community, is now part of the LGBT organisation London Friend.

“London Friend's dedicated helpline offers support and practical information to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered callers who have been bereaved or are preparing for bereavement. Our trained volunteers also welcome calls from affected family, friends, colleagues and carers.”

<http://www.londonfriend.org.uk/bereavementhelpline/>

- **The Alzheimer's Society Lesbian and Gay Carers Network**

'The Alzheimer's Society's Lesbian and Gay Network is a telephone support service for lesbians and for gay men. Trained and skilled volunteers are able to offer a listening ear to gay and lesbian carers.

'The Alzheimer's Society Lesbian and Gay Network supports the needs of people with dementia and carers who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender.'

http://www.alzheimers.org.uk/Gay_Carers/index.htm

- **The London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard**

Switchboard aims to:

- maintain comprehensive information on support, social and specialist services of relevance to lesbians, gay men and bisexuals
- raise awareness of sexual health issues including safer sex and to endorse positive personal choice
- offer support and initial advice to all callers on any problems they are facing
- suggest sources of more specialist advice, counselling or other help if callers want it.

<http://www.llgs.org.uk/>

- **Stonewall Housing**

Stonewall Housing provides advice and advocacy for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities in London. It has an information service on housing for LGBT people of all ages:

<http://www.stonewallhousing.org/home.html>

- **Galop**

Galop is London's LGBT community safety charity. It offers a helpline, and advocacy to those affected by homophobic crime.

<http://www.galop.org.uk/>

- **PACE**

PACE is an organisation which responds to the emotional, mental and physical health needs of lesbians and gay men in the greater London area. It runs a variety of workshops, including those for lesbian women and in some cases bisexual women.

<http://www.pacehealth.org.uk/>

- **Broken Rainbow**

Broken Rainbow offers support to LGBT people experiencing domestic violence. This could include not only abuse by partners, but also by family members of older lesbians and bisexual women.

<http://www.broken-rainbow.org.uk/>

There are many other useful LGBT organisations, and lesbian community websites, in London which can be discovered from Queery the database of the London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard at

<http://www.queery.org.uk/>