

NEWSLETTER



LOVE IS ALL AROUND...

Valentine's Day is coming up, lesbian and gay couples can register as a Civil Partnership.

Hundreds of same-sex couples have now got legal recognition for their relationships. Civil partnerships provide a wide range of rights and responsibilities similar to marriage for those couples, each over 16 years old, who choose to register. These include equal treatment for taxation, life assurance, employment and pension benefits. One example of the impact of the Civil Partnership Bill is that registered, and even co-habiting same-sex couples, are now treated as making one joint claim for welfare benefits, so you may want to think before you decide to get a civil partnership for Valentine's Day. Ask your Supported Housing Officer for more information on the matter.



But unfortunately it's not all love and peace.. HATE CRIME...

Reports of homophobic abuse are still all too regular. Even in our own schemes, tenants have received homophobic abuse from some people in the area.

But, don't have nightmares! There are people to talk to, there are LGBT Police Liaison Officers in most London Boroughs now and there are ways we can report incidents which can improve the situation. See Page 5 for more details.



Welcome to Ron and Andrea, the new Supported Housing Officers, who started in the last 3 months.

NEW HERE

Welcome to Alex, Ronnie, Adam and Janine who moved into Stonewall Housing's supported accommodation over the last 3 months. We hope your stay with us will be beneficial and the support offered to you will help you achieve your goals.

RESOLUTIONS

It's the time of the year when we usually promise to get fit, spend less or stop smoking. We also have some resolutions to make...

Once every 3 years we review the Strategic Plan for Stonewall Housing. The staff and Management Committee have agreed the new plan for 2006 to 2009. This will be regularly reviewed so that it won't be like some resolutions which can only last a few days.

More details will follow but here's a sneak preview...

The main aims of the Supported Housing side are:

- * to offer our service to Bisexual and Transgender, as well as Lesbian and Gay clients.
- * to develop a Client Forum, which will elect someone on to the Stonewall Housing Management Committee and get involved in staff recruitment.
- * to keep improving the quality of the support we offer
- * to investigate other ways to offer supported housing to LGBT communities.

We want your views on these ideas, so we will be approaching you for your thoughts soon.

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Stonewall Housing provides support to 41 young lesbian and gay men. They live in 6 different houses, which accommodate between 5 and 9 people, across 4 London boroughs. Stonewall Housing does not own any properties itself, rather it works with various landlords to provide supported accommodation.

In each issue we will be updating you with information that we keep about the schemes. If there is other information you are interested in finding out then just ask...

During the three months between October and December 2005, in all 6 houses:

- There were 26 fire alarm tests
- There was 0 fire drills
- There was 2 incidents when police came to schemes following disturbances.
- There was 1 formal complaint about visitors. This is currently being investigated.
- There were 4 informal complaints concerning maintenance, landlords and noise. Supported Housing Officers have dealt with each complaint.
- There was 1 risk assessment carried out for all schemes about handling cleaning products and other chemicals. More safety details about handling products will be distributed to all houses within the next few weeks.



All clients are invited to observe the Stonewall Housing's **Management Committee Meetings**.

what do you think?

They take place every 6 weeks usually on a Tuesday evening from 6.30pm for about one hour and are held at the Head Office on Essex Road.

Refreshments are provided so let us know if you want to attend so that we can meet all dietary requirements. See Page 4 for the date of the next meetings.

Bob carries out his '**surgeries**' at most schemes at least once every three months. This is an opportunity for you to talk to him directly and in private.

In November and December 2005 he carried out surgeries at 3 of the 6 schemes and saw 3 people individually, discussing a range of issues, such as repairs, noise, homophobic abuse and resettlement.

Keep an eye out for the **invite** to the next surgeries in March which will be delivered through your door.

Tenant Meetings were held at one scheme in November 2005. Issues discussed included health and safety, maintenance, relationship with the landlord and homophobic abuse. The minutes were sent to the tenants of the relevant house.

We are arranging tenants' meetings in all houses to gauge whether they should continue on a regular basis. It is hoped that landlords will be invited to most meetings to discuss management issues such as maintenance and rent collection.

Again, invites will be delivered ahead of any planned meetings.

New Year resolutions...

This time of year can be difficult when it comes to managing money after the present-buying of Christmas and the celebrations of the New Year. Here are a few tips about making what we have got, stretch a little further. (Thanks to Ron and the Citizen's Advice Bureau).



Can I worry about that later?

Don't bury your head in the sand. Unpaid bills will only come back to haunt you. Think about a budgeting plan before you get into trouble. Firstly, how much money is coming in through benefits or wages? Secondly, what needs to be paid—think about rent and fines first as you could lose your home or freedom if these are not paid. Thirdly, debts and other necessities (food, toiletries) need to be paid. Then we can think about the luxuries—we all need to enjoy ourselves, but it's best to plan for this so we don't let this control the other parts of the plan. Easier said than done! Keep track of what you spend, as no one else will. Your SHO can help with budget plans.

What if?

Sometimes we may get into trouble—missing a rent payment or credit card bill, for example. The Citizen's Advice Bureau divides debts into:
Priority debts: if you don't pay your rent you may lose your accommodation. Or if you don't pay a fine you may be sent to prison. So you should try to pay these first.
Non-priority debts: you may face a court appearance for credit card or catalogue debts but not prison. Most companies will accept a reasonable offer of regular payment.

Can I afford to work?

The full rent for most of the Supported Housing schemes is around £100 per week. Most people receive Housing Benefit to help them cover the weekly charge. Housing Benefit can be affected by the number of hours you work or the amount you earn. Therefore, it is very important that you know that you can afford to pay the full rent if you decide to work too many hours or earn too much. Your Supported Housing Officer can advise you on the current allowances to ensure you can still afford to pay the weekly rent.

It is also important to keep Housing Benefit aware of any change of circumstances (where you live, what you earn, what benefit you receive) as soon as possible so that there is no delay in payments or risk of them claiming an overpayment in the future. Also worth remembering is that resettlement can be put on hold if you have rent arrears.

Can you help?

Stonewall Housing has a small fund to help if anyone is in hardship. Unfortunately, there is usually a limit on the number of times one can apply for assistance, the 'pot' has to last 12 months and is shared between housing clients and advice clients. Ask your Supported Housing Officer if you want to make an application.



next issue Postponed until the next issue (as we are waiting for confirmation of various landlord's policies about the matter):

ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR:

Do you suffer distress, fear or insecurity due to someone else's anti-social behaviour? Have you any thoughts on how such behaviour should be dealt with? If so, pass them to your Supported Housing Officer by Friday 31 March 2006 and we will try to answer them.



Stonewall Housing's Protection from Abuse Policy has just been reviewed. So here are the key points:

What is abuse?

It can be physical (any use of unnecessary force—punching, pinching etc), sexual (any sexual act not consented to, or forced to consent to), emotional (threats of harm or abandonment, denial of choice or option, denial of privacy or dignity) or financial (theft, exploitation or hanging around only when someone has money). Clients could be abused by other clients, visitors or staff.

What are the signs of abuse?

A few examples to look out for: any unusual and unexplained behaviour, unexplained change in material circumstances, anxiety or confusion, tendency towards social isolation or withdrawal, unexplained injuries, personal possessions going missing.

What do I do if I think someone may be being abused?

If you suspect that someone is being abused then mention it to a member of staff as soon as possible. Alternatively, you can mention it directly to a Services Manager or the Director at head office. The Housing Services Manager will then arrange for any emergency action, if necessary, and begin an investigation.

If you wish your name can be kept confidential for as long as possible, however, if the police do get involved then we may have to share details of who reported the allegation.

What is Stonewall Housing doing to prevent abuse taking place?

- * All staff are checked through the Criminal Record Bureau.
- * Bob Green, the Housing Services Manager, carries out regular surgeries so that clients are able to report any allegations directly to him.
- * Staff are no longer allowed to keep money or valuables in safekeeping for clients.
- * If clients still pay rent to Stonewall Housing staff then they should always be given a receipt and should check their rent statement to ensure money received is banked.

next issue

The spotlight will be on the Health and Safety Policy.

What's it all about? How can clients be involved in checking health and safety?



WATCH OUT!



Remember the **clocks** go forward one hour in the early hours of Sunday 26 March 2006.

Dates of the next **Management Committee Meetings**: 6.30pm Tuesday 17th January, 28th February 2006. Let us know as soon as possible if you want to observe so that we can arrange food.

February is **LGBT History Month**. Look out for events being organised in your area.

The next **newsletter** will be out in early April 2006. If you have any material for the next newsletter then get it to Bob Green by Friday 31 March 2006.

At least two clients have reported that they have been the victims of homophobic abuse recently. Unfortunately homophobic attacks still happen, with sometimes fatal consequences. We can't predict when attacks will happen and we certainly can't hide away so Galop have provided some safety tips and advice on reporting an incident, if anything does happen.

Do's and Don'ts

DO - Be aware of what's happening around you

Trust your instincts

Only take licensed taxis (call 020 7222 1234 to check)

Look confident

Walk in a determined manner, as if you know where you're going (even if you don't)

If you know you will be drinking or taking drugs then plan ahead and book a cab with friends rather than travel when you are under the influence and more vulnerable.

If you are taking a stranger home then try to introduce them to your friends or make sure a barman/doorman sees you leave together.

Tell the person you are taking home that you live with someone (even if you don't)

If you're going back to their place then tell friends where you're going

DON'T - Walk in badly lit, lonely short-cuts

Travel at night alone, or if you do have to then sit near the driver of the tube/bus/train, or where there are other people.

Try to engage in a fight, rather find a way out or calm the situation down.

INTERNET - If you meet someone over the internet, beware people can lie.

Get as much information about them as possible.

Tell someone you trust where you are going if you are going to their place.

Meet them in public for the first time, if possible.

Liquid 11 can provide you with a temporary phone number that screens calls to your mobile—text the word SAFE to 80876 for a seven day number at a charge of £1.50.

If you are attacked

If you are the victim of an assault or homophobic abuse then there are different ways of reporting it:

- * report it directly to the police (phoning 999 if it is an emergency) and ask for the Community Safety Unit to put you through to the LGBT Liaison Officer (most areas have one). You should be given a crime reference number.
- * report all the details of the incident to Galop, who can then pass it to the police who may contact you for a statement. Due to the number of incidents they deal with, it may take some time before it gets reported to the police.
- * report the incident anonymously (there will be no crime reference number but the police will use the information for their own intelligence and statistics)
- * ask Galop to be a go-between with the police (you may have to give a statement)

The police can issue warnings to perpetrators of abuse/hate crimes, and could end up with a sentence so it is best to keep reporting incidents until things improve.

Keep a record of incident(s) you want to report. That is, dates, times, witnesses, an account of what happened and photographs of damage or injury may be useful.

Galop refer victims of hate crime to Victim Support and they also can assist with Criminal Injury Compensation Applications as well as complaints against the police, if necessary.

Galop's Advice Line (020 7704 2040) is open Monday (5pm-8pm), Wednesday (2pm-5pm) and Friday (12pm-2pm). Or visit their website for more information: www.galop.org.uk



CONTRIBUTIONS

Unfortunately there have been no contributions from clients so this page is blank.

Do you have a story, poem, article, drawing or photograph for the next newsletter?
If so, just give it to your Supported Housing Officer, or send it to Head Office.

