

LGBTQ+ Inclusivity

May 2019



T.E.D.

Ageing Better
in East Lindsey

Increasing inclusivity and reaching and engaging older people who are LGBTQ+

This report highlights learning from the TED programme on how we can increase inclusivity and engage with older people who are LGBTQ+. Data has been collected via semi-structured interviews, focus groups, case study reports and informal conversations with TED staff, delivery partners, volunteers, service users and a key contact from a LGBTQ+ community group in East Lindsey. Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and thematically analysed. Pseudonyms have been given to all participants to protect anonymity.

About TED

Talk Eat Drink (TED) Ageing Better in East Lindsey is part of Ageing Better, a programme set up by The National Lottery Community Fund, the largest funder of community activity in the UK. Ageing Better aims to develop creative ways for people aged over 50 to be actively involved in their local communities, helping to combat social isolation and loneliness. It is one of five major programmes set up by The National Lottery Community Fund to test and learn from new approaches to designing services which aim to make people's lives healthier and happier.



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LGBTQ+ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer. The ‘+’ sign recognises and encompasses other gender and sexual minorities that fall under this umbrella term.

Introduction

Research has shown that older LGBTQ+ people are particularly vulnerable to loneliness and social isolation. Compared to heterosexuals, LGBTQ+ people are more likely to be single and living alone, they are less likely to be parents and have lower levels of social contact with relatives (Fredriksen-Goldsen et al., 2013). In addition, findings from the Leeds-based Sage project (Time to Shine, Ageing Better programme) suggest that older LGBTQ+ people are less likely to engage with local services and many do not trust professionals to understand their culture or lifestyle (Care Connect & Age UK, 2018).

According to JUST Lincolnshire (2019), there is currently no accurate data on the numbers of LGBTQ+ people who live in Lincolnshire, or East Lindsey specifically. This reflects a national problem with accurate statistical analysis. The National Lottery Community Fund’s Common Measurement Framework (CMF) data (see Figure 1) suggests that our TED services are only reaching or engaging a very small number of LGBTQ+ people who are aged 50 and over and who live in East Lindsey. These findings are concerning and have been explored further through a recent qualitative study that forms the focus of this present report.

Research methods

Between March and May 2019, learning and evaluation data was collected via semi-structured interviews, focus groups, case study reports and informal conversations with TED staff, delivery partners, volunteers, service users and and a key contact from a LGBTQ+ community group in East Lindsey.

Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and thematically analysed. Pseudonyms

have been given to all participants to protect anonymity.

From data analysis a range of themes emerged. We focus here on: the inclusivity of our TED projects and commissioned services; reaching and engaging more vulnerable and/or socially isolated LGBTQ+ people who are aged 50 and over; older people’s perceptions of the LGBTQ+ community; and the need to procure specialist LGBTQ+ training and consultancy.

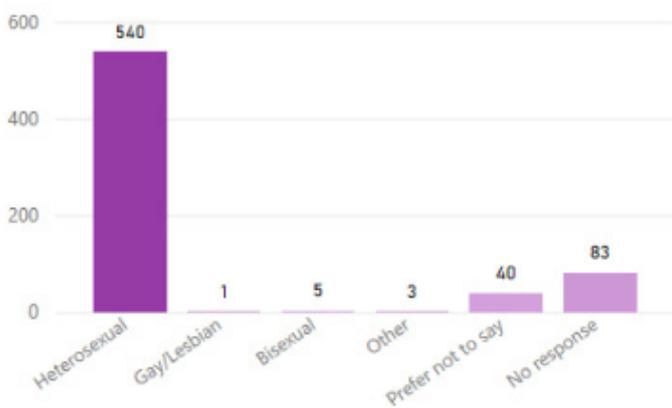


Figure 1: CMF results on the sexual orientation of TED service users

Findings and discussion

Are TED projects and commissioned services actively inclusive?

During the interviews, TED delivery partners mentioned working with people from the LGBTQ+ community in East Lindsey. As Jack and Tina illustrate, they believe strongly that their services are, and should be, LGBTQ+ inclusive and meet the needs of all older adults who access their services:

'But I mean we've always worked with LGBT individuals and have never found it an issue. You know we've always tried to make sure they're integrated. I mean we do the reverse and we try not to make anybody stand out, it's just what we do. Everybody's welcome... We treat everybody the same.' (Jack, Delivery Partner)

'At the end of the day we are very inclusive anyway. It doesn't matter what your sexual preferences are, if you're aged over 50 you're very welcome.' (Tina, Delivery Partner)

On the other hand, some of our delivery partners acknowledged that their services may not yet be reaching or engaging vulnerable and/or socially isolated LGBTQ+ people, and although enthusiasm and commitment has been shown towards addressing this issue, how to address it has been problematized by both delivery partners and service users:

'I don't think we've probably reached LGBT people to a certain extent. We've had two transgender referrals but other than that we've not sort of come across it. It's not an area we've come across a lot. There are so many of these [LGBTQ+] people out there that I think are really isolated and lonely but we don't hear about them. I think a lot of these people go under the radar.' (Sheila, Delivery Partner)

'You've got to be careful if you want to engage with a specific group of people that they don't feel they're being targeted for some reason. So I think that needs thinking about, how to do it in an appropriate way. But I'd love to see more of that. And I think it would be good to use the existing resources we have and the groups that we have. But how do we do it, I don't know' (Charles, Delivery Partner)

'I've never seen anything with regards to any group where it excluded. But I think certain people need to feel included. Does that make sense? Even though nothing about your documentation, nothing about your branding or advertising excludes anybody but kind of like me as a man who in a lot of group situations feels like it's pretty much female dominated. I might feel excluded unless I saw a sign that I'm included, that men are included. And I think maybe people, I mean I have a friend who's completely transitioned and I know they have been through an absolutely horrid time over the last 20 years. I mean LGBT suicide rates are one of the highest of all aren't they because they just can not feel like they're fitting in. They don't know where they belong. And I think sometimes it's not about being excluded but they need to feel included. But that makes another hurdle because you don't want to make the group about them.' (Mike, Service User)



TED staff and delivery partners

How can we reach and engage more vulnerable and/or socially isolated LGBTQ+ people who are aged 50 and over and who live in rural East Lindsey?

Addressing the topic, on how we can reach and engage older LGBTQ+ people, with TED delivery partners and volunteers has shown to be a positive experience. Asking research questions in this area has encouraged delivery partners to think about service inclusivity, for example, Tina and Lorraine put forward several ideas and suggestions on how TED services can better engage and reach older LGBTQ+ people who live in East Lindsey. Connecting with established LGBTQ+ community groups and health related services and organisations was considered, by Tina and Lorraine, to be particularly important. Here, they highlight how this marketing strategy may provide further opportunities for promoting and advertising TED services including TED friendship group sessions:

‘With my contacts in the neighbourhood teams I could ask them to point me to the groups and people that are LGBTQ+ groups. I am sure they will know about them because of course they need to protect these minority groups. They will have the resources that I may be able to gather and from there I can just attend and find out what their concerns are, what their needs are, and see how I can support them. It is finding and researching where they are, and then attending a meeting with them to see what we can do.’ (Tina, Delivery Partner)

‘TED need to promote what services they have got set up. They need to have some kind of a database or some kind of sort of you know, what’s happening to everybody. Because I mean I know everybody works separately, but when you think... I mean it’s a small community but local hospitals are 20 miles away and everything is sort of in it. So I mean even the core connect (bus service). I think the local services they should be acknowledging what’s going on and linking up to whomever. I think the more they promote the LGBT groups. I mean I just retired but in the youth service there’s only a certain core that knows about these LGBTQ+ groups. But TED has the money to actually advertise and link up people. There are a lot of people out there that could access these groups and whether it is transport problems or health problems, they’ve got to realise that we are open for everybody. Obviously we can take on board what we can as long as we know what we’re dealing with and if LGBT people are coming to us then we need to be putting things in place to make sure we are being inclusive and they feel included.’
(Lorraine, Volunteer)

In Lincolnshire there are a range of services designed to support LGBTQ+ people and communities. These services include regular group meetings, outdoor clubs and online discussion groups (for a full list of services see LGBT Resource Directory, 2018). At present, however, there are very few LGBTQ+ support services in the rural areas of East Lindsey. The only service identified in the research process that provides support for LGBTQ+ people, aged 50 and over, was the Skegness LGBTQ Meet-up Group; their key areas of work include advice and information, befriending, networks and social groups, pride, self-help and support groups, and sexual health. A key contact from the Skegness LGBTQ Meet-up Group informed TED, during a telephone conversation, that they are currently supporting 200 LGBTQ+ individuals through their online Facebook group and 20 people attend their weekly meeting sessions. Approximately 75% of their members are aged 50 and over and have experienced loneliness and/or social isolation. Email correspondence with the group also attests to the lack of support there is for older LGBTQ+ people in East Lindsey:

'We are a fairly new group, set up to assist the LGBTQ community in Skegness. Prior to our set up, every member of the LGBTQ community was on there own as there was not even a bar or café [in Skegness] aimed at them. We are now providing a weekly meeting, usually held in a Skegness pub. Having just found you online I was wondering if you could help us in any way, if only by letting folks know we exist.' (Key contact from the Skegness LGBTQ Meet-up Group)

The Skegness LGBTQ Meet-up Group have expressed their interest in TED and requested more information on the projects and services we currently offer.

In sum, TED Ageing Better in East Lindsey seeks to address the dearth of support services available to older LGBTQ+ individuals who live in East Lindsey. We aim to do this by connecting and making links with existing LGBTQ+ groups in the area and by ensuring that all TED projects and services are actively inclusive of this population group and that they are reaching and engaging vulnerable and/or socially isolated LGBTQ+ people.



What are older people's perceptions of the LGBTQ+ community?

Previous research has suggested that higher rates of social isolation and loneliness in LGBTQ+ individuals may be attributed in part to a variety of historical and generational reasons. Many older people grew up and became sexually active during a time when homosexuality was illegal (see also Bristol Ageing Better, 2019). Living in a largely heteronormative world generated much homo/bi/transphobia and the common attitude towards LGBTQ+ people was that they had a mental illness and needed psychiatric help. This led to many individuals suffering minority stress, low self-esteem, and social exclusion (Noret et al., 2006; Kuyper & Fokkema, 2010), and it was not until 1992 that the World Health Organisation declassified homosexuality as a mental disorder.

Over the last few decades, attitudes towards sexuality have changed profoundly and there has been a growing acceptance and recognition of LGBTQ+ people and communities in our society. That being said, LGBTQ+ discrimination does still occur and unfortunately it is an issue that has had to be raised by delivery partners involved with the TED programme, as Charles states:

'Volunteers involved in some of the groups. You know when people sit around and tell jokes [LGBTQ+ related]. I know [delivery partner] found some of those jokes a bit inappropriate on a couple of occasions; we have raised it and spoke to them. It's been mentioned and it's been raised and as far as I know it's been resolved. A lot of awareness raising is definitely required!'

(Charles, Delivery Partner)

Hayley and Nora express their views on how they feel older people tend to perceive LGBTQ+ individuals and communities. As Nora illustrates, however, the older generation are not a homogenous group and there is a strong need for more awareness and understanding on sexual diversity and the differences between sexual orientation and gender identity:

'Because kids get taught it at school now, don't they. It's all about equal opportunities and, you know, I just think the older generation are a bit more 'stand backish' because it just wasn't spoken about years ago was it.'

(Hayley, Delivery Partner)

'I try very hard not to be judgmental but I don't know whether that would be the same for other people in this particular club, it's very small. And I put my money on the fact that a lot of people would not accept what you've just said because they don't understand it. It's very difficult for people. I mean me, I don't give a monkeys because I've had a lot of gay friends over the years and I think if you make a friend of a gay man you have a friend for life. I'm sorry but that's just how I found it. It's difficult but with the gay people I don't have a problem, transgender I've never actually come across anybody but I'm one of these people... I would want to sit down and talk to them. I would say "why, why, why? Talk to me". I want to know what's going through their minds because I'm like that. I want to know things. And it's no good judging people if you don't know what they're about.'

(Nora, Service User)

Do we need to procure specialist LGBTQ+ training and consultancy?

Interviewees were asked whether they thought specialist LGBTQ+ training and consultancy would benefit the TED programme. Responses were largely positive and most felt that specialist training would help to educate people and enhance their awareness and knowledge on sexual orientation and gender identity. Participants also felt that training could provide ideas on how we can make our projects and services actively inclusive, to ensure we are reaching and engaging older LGBTQ+ people who are socially isolated and/or lonely. For example, Mike and Tina state:

'I think so. I think because of course we're all dealing with older people over 50 some of them may be quite rigid in their thinking. It will be helpful for them to have some training. I mean every little thing that you know every day always helps doesn't it. I mean that is my philosophy, if I learn something new every day that's good. So I think it is quite a good mantra to TED If you learn something it just widens your horizons, it makes you learn something different and it makes you open your eyes to things that you may not have encountered.

I don't see why we can't have LGBT training just to open minds, especially for the volunteers.' (Tina, Delivery Partner)

'Training, oh yes, very much so. I think Loneliness is a killer. I don't think there's anything worse then when somebody is sad at home and the reason they are at home is because they're afraid to go out the front door. You know my friend that I mentioned before? It would be difficult to make her feel included, you know the person who has had a full transition. And you've got people who are at various [transition] stages and there are so many versions of gender. Training could help with that couldn't it, and it could bring ideas.' (Mike, Service User)

Moreover, some delivery partners and TED staff members reported that, when supporting service users to complete CMFs, they did not feel comfortable including or asking questions around gender identity and sexual orientation. To protect anonymity pseudonyms and job roles have not been attached to the following participant quotes:

'OK when I'm helping them fill in the forms, I generally don't like asking that question because I generally think it's nothing to do with me. It's their private life you know. I don't think it's relevant. But I get a feel for that person when I'm talking to them and if I think, do you know what it's fine to ask, I do. And I do generally try and ask it. But sometimes well there's been a couple where I've just felt like I don't think they're going to react well. So there have been times when I have not asked that question. Sometimes it's hard enough to get people to fill in the form when they are a bit reluctant to and they think why are you asking me to fill in this form. So I will skip out that question because sometimes it is hard to get them to fill it in in the first place. But if they're very friendly and very upbeat, I will ask it. But don't get me wrong. I do not like asking it. In fact I hate asking it to be honest in case I get a response like what's it to do with you.'

'There have been people where they have not been as femininely dressed as others. And hence there has been one person where I did not ask that question. I don't know how they would feel if I was asking that question and they thought I was judging them. Even though it's on a sheet and it's on a questionnaire. I do find it an awkward question.'

'If I really think... oh no I have got to ask that question, I always make a point of then saying there is a couple of questions on here I don't have to ask. You can just skip past them. And I sort of have the CMF tilted a little bit to one side and I just run my thumb over it because I just have that impression they'd be really offended.'

'I don't think it should be asked because it doesn't affect what they're doing because it doesn't affect who they are. They want to register with TED for their own personal reasons and it don't stop them attending and taking part in the activities. It doesn't stop them doing Fitness Food and Friends does it or anything.'

'Kids are brought up learning about it now and it has been drummed into them now that it is ok. So if it was teenagers I would feel a lot more comfortable talking about it and I probably wouldn't miss the [gender and sexuality] questions out to be honest. Well, I wouldn't, I wouldn't miss the question out. Training would be good definitely, because I am sure that there are going to be other people that are not going to want to ask people those questions. I bet you didn't get that question on a questionnaire 20 years ago. I bet you didn't. Now it's on everything isn't it. There's always that option of putting no response and I have ticked that because I have not asked the question.'

These findings suggest that, due to the stigma which still exists around sexual orientation and gender identity, people have been underreporting and may have been inputting incorrect data into the TED Common Measurement Framework (CMF) evaluation forms; thus highlighting the difficulties of obtaining accurate data on gender and sexuality and further justifying the need for specialist LGBTQ+ training and consultancy within our programme.

Summary points and key learning messages:



Older LGBTQ+ people are at particular risk of social isolation and/or loneliness and it is therefore important for our TED staff, delivery partners and volunteers to feel confident working with LGBTQ+ individuals and communities



TED must form connections with local LGBTQ+ community groups and health related services and organisations to promote and advertise the TED projects and services that are offered in East Lindsey



CMF data suggests that our TED services are only reaching and engaging a very small number of LGBTQ+ people who are aged 50 and over and who live in rural East Lindsey



Obtaining accurate data about gender and sexuality is difficult due to the stigma which still exists around sexual orientation and gender identity



There is a lack of support services for older LGBTQ+ people in East Lindsey and the Skegness LGBTQ Meet-up Group has expressed an interest in TED and would like to hear more about the services and projects that are on offer throughout the programme



Specialist LGBTQ+ training and consultancy is needed to: educate people on the differences between sexual orientation and gender identity; enhance awareness and understanding on sexual diversity; and to ensure that our TED staff, delivery partners and volunteers feel confident creating environments that are inclusive and welcoming and that are reaching and engaging LGBTQ+ individuals

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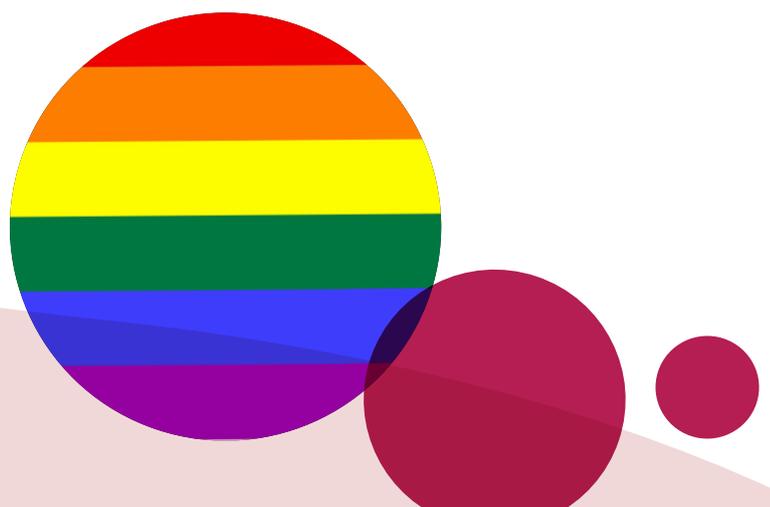
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About East Lindsey



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East Lindsey is a large, sparsely populated district within the county of Lincolnshire, which includes the popular coastal seaside towns of Skegness and Mablethorpe.

East Lindsey has a higher than average ageing population with 29% of people aged 65 and over. High numbers of older people move to East Lindsey in their retirement years and many have multiple chronic health conditions and few social and familial connections in the region. Public transport across East Lindsey is poor and therefore accessing services can be challenging, especially for older adults.

The overarching aims of the TED programme are to:

- Reduce social isolation and loneliness
- Help older people to become better connected with volunteering, social, leisure and health improving activities
- Provide opportunities for older people to influence the design, delivery and evaluation of both the services and businesses available to them

We currently have 1279 registered TED members, 69 businesses across East Lindsey hold an Age-friendly Business Accreditation, and 451 volunteers have contributed 6,751 hours to the TED programme between April 2018 and February 2019.

Further information...

To find out more about TED or to get involved visit our website www.tedineastlindsey.co.uk or start a conversation and share your views online: Twitter: [@ted_EastLindsey](https://twitter.com/@ted_EastLindsey)



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