

# Stonewall and the Trans Community

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Saturday's meeting with Stonewall is a welcome change to the organisation's past stance regarding the trans\* community. I welcome this opportunity to discuss how Stonewall can become part of a force for good in terms of trans rights. There are many areas of concern and while this document will not cover all of them, I hope to present an overview of some important areas of trans rights that Stonewall can be effective in.

## Fitting Trans Issues Into Stonewall's Current Work

Stonewall has several areas of activity, ranging from its free information service, to work tackling homophobic bullying, to working with legislators to improve the law for LGB people. There are several areas where trans issues could be integrated into Stonewall's existing work.

According to Stonewall personnel at the 2013 Conservative Party Conference, Stonewall already directs trans callers to its "info line" to T-Vox (a free source of in-depth information on trans, intersex and genderqueer topics) for information. This is an excellent start but passing a person on to a separate organisation is not always the best method of dealing with every case that comes up.

Not everyone has access to a computer, or an Internet connection, and T-Vox does not currently print leaflets or booklets to pass out to people (although we are working on some) and even when they do, some topics can be quickly answered without having to redirect the caller.

Existing helpline topics such as challenging bullying in work or school; what to do if you think you've been discriminated against; adoption rights; and reporting hate crimes do not differ by a vast amount if the caller is trans or cis, so scripts and/or training on these topics could be expanded to cover all LGBT callers.

The same is true of many of Stonewall's publications. Asylum & immigration; hate crimes; housing; equal opportunities monitoring; etc are all reasonably similar whether the person being dealt with is LGB or T. Some topics, such as Health and Social Care, would need either a separate document or a vastly expanded document (trans healthcare is, by necessity, a much wider area to discuss) but other organisations could be worked with to put together a suitable document to replace or run alongside the existing one.

Work to tackle homophobic bullying need not be modified too extensively to also cover transphobic bullying. There is a large overlap in the minds of homophobes and transphobes, so dealing with both forms of discrimination at the same time makes a lot of sense.

As before, much of the legislation and advice will overlap when integrating trans issues but where there are differences, existing trans organisations can advise on what changes would need to be made to make Stonewall's existing work fully LGBT.

Finally, we need to look at the Parliamentary work. Without dredging up the past too much, it has been the Parliamentary area where Stonewall has caused the majority of problems for trans people.

Key factors such as the ability to discriminate against trans\* people for "Genuine Occupational Reasons" and the elimination of other safeguards against trans discrimination in the Equality Act; the Spousal Veto in the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act; etc are all examples of times where a strong, effective lobbying group could help trans people to improve their lot politically.

## Key Areas of Trans Concern

Trans rights in the UK have a long way to go before they can be seen as even remotely equal, so there are many areas of trans concern right now. In the interests of not swamping this initial meeting, I have elected to focus on three key areas of concern that keep cropping up during my work with LGBTory and T-Vox.

## **Trans Healthcare**

Access to healthcare for trans and other gender identity problems in the UK varies from problematic to impossible, depending on where you live and how competent your GP is. Even when you get access to treatment, there are long waiting lists, funding problems and barriers set up by local funding authorities to prevent you getting the help you need. This needs to change.

Can Stonewall do anything about this? There's no silver bullet, no waving of a magic wand to solve these problems. There is, however, the potential to improve information and advice given over Stonewall's helpline so that people who don't know where to turn can get clear, accurate information on what to do; and also those who experience blocks and other problems in their treatment can find out who they can turn to to solve the problems.

In addition, there is the potential to educate healthcare professionals at all levels (GP up to specialist and even administrators in the funding authorities) so they know what they can do - and what they are supposed to do - when dealing with trans patients.

With a little extra education, perhaps we can eliminate the problem of doctors attributing every single aspect of a trans person's health to their being trans. "You've got depression/a heart condition/diabetes/a broken leg? We'll need to stop your HRT" springs to mind but it's not limited to this. The responses to #TransDocFail demonstrated that healthcare for trans people is a minefield of neglect, abuse and incompetence.

Better education on trans issues will go a long way toward sorting this mess out, and this is something Stonewall can bring its expertise to right now.

## **Trans Access to Mental Health Services**

This is closely linked to the general healthcare problems talked about above, but it also goes further than that. Having discussed local mental health provision with trans people in the North, I'm acutely aware that everything is put down to their being trans, regardless of other underlying causes. This is then used to dismiss patients and deny them the treatment they need; usually for budgetary reasons but sometimes out of simple transphobia.

Helping people with mental health issues is not always as straightforward as providing a helpline they can call when they experience difficulties accessing treatment. Nevertheless, a facility to assist those who find (or suspect) they are being treated improperly is essential to remedying the problems faced by trans people in need of mental health services.

Whether Stonewall can assist here is debatable, but perhaps they can assist in the creation of a dedicated group with skills in the mental health field who can then provide this service.

## **Bullying In Schools**

Bullying in schools is not limited to children; as we will all have unfortunately seen for ourselves after what happened to Lucy Meadows. Proper education and training in LGBT issues needs to be provided to children, teachers, school staff and, if possible, parents.

Stonewall has a solid track record of providing LGB education materials to schools. They are ideally placed to expand this into full and equal treatment of trans people.

## **Looking to the Future**

The three topics discussed above are only the start. There will be a lot more work to be done in the future, both by Stonewall and through other organisations. However, when working with or facilitating the work of other organisations, one thing must be made clear: transphobia can no longer be tolerated.

Stonewall has a history of associating with transphobic organisations (Paddy Power springs instantly to mind here but there are others as well). If Stonewall is to be taken seriously as a trans-inclusive organisation, this association with transphobic groups needs to stop. This will send a clear message to everyone that not only has Stonewall changed but that everyone else needs to deal respectfully with the trans community as well.

There are many areas not covered in this document and there is no doubt that other areas of concern will arise in the future. For now, this opening discussion is a big step in the right direction. If some or all of the concerns raised here can be dealt with then we will be on the right track.

I look forward to seeing what the outcome of Saturday's meeting will be.