

# EQUALLY DIFFERENT

## REPORT

ON THE SITUATION OF OLDER LESBIAN, GAY, BI-SEXUAL AND  
TRANSGENDERED PEOPLE IN THANET, KENT

**by**

**“Opening Doors in Thanet”**

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**On the situation of older lesbian,  
gay, bi-sexual and transgendered  
people in Thanet, Kent**

**by**

**“Opening Doors in Thanet”**

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## **OPENING DOORS IN THANET**

This Report has been compiled by a group of older people, living in the Isle of Thanet, non-heterosexual and heterosexual, who are aware of and want to help service-providers understand the difficulties, and improve the lives, of Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgendered (LGBT) older people. The group is called "Opening Doors in Thanet" (ODIT) and was set up as a result of the National Conference, "Opening Doors", held in London in April 2002 by Age Concern England.

The group consists of men and women with experience in working with local and national lesbian/gay support groups, as well as other local organisations.

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE LGBT?

Awareness and understanding of LGBT people is improving all the time. The days before the law changed and sex between consenting males was no longer a crime are in the distant and unhappy past. However, life can still be difficult because –

- there are still laws that discriminate against LGBT people
- laws that support LGBT people are yet to be passed
- people misunderstand and are therefore afraid of LGBT people
- many LGBT people are left out of family and social life
- most LGBT people are not recognisable by appearance, so are assumed to be heterosexual
- transgendered people are the least understood of all.

Many older LGBT people, those now retired and who have been the pioneers in changing attitudes, are now finding life more difficult as they age and are going back “in the closet” (ie: passing as heterosexual, with all the lies, deception and stress that involves).

There have been three gay murders in Thanet in recent years. The police response to this has been supportive and encouraging to LGBT people.

PC Pears says, with regard to older LGBT people, “Everyone thinks gay means young. That’s absurd. You don’t stop being left-handed when you are older. Why should people think you stop being gay or lesbian?”

## THE REPORT

This Report is based on the results of a questionnaire sent out to sheltered housing providers, residential homes, nursing homes, care companies and day centres catering for the needs of the older population of Thanet.

Addresses for Sheltered Housing, Residential Homes, Nursing Homes and Care Companies were taken from the “Kent Directory of Care Services 2002” and “The Island Guide to Services for Older People in Thanet”.

**“The fear of encountering homophobia when using services is very real for many lesbian women and gay men, but could potentially be addressed through the introduction of more targeted services.”**

*‘Waiting to be heard – dementia and the gay community’*

*Richard Ward*

*Journal for Dementia Care – May 2000*

## OPENING DOORS

The original “Opening Doors” Conference in London, held by Age Concern England in April 2002, raised certain issues amongst many older Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgendered (LGBT) people.

In their report<sup>1</sup> Age Concern defined six key recommendations that had emerged from the day –

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

**“Lesbians and gay men now in their 70s have spent at least half of their lives in varying degrees of secrecy, anguish, anxiety, fear, confusion, deceit, shame, excitement, fun, joy and love.”**

*Gordon Lishman, Director General – Age Concern England*

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<sup>1</sup> Opening Doors – Report of the one-day conference held in London in April 2002

## THE ISLE OF THANET

The Isle of Thanet covers an area of 10,315 hectares, incorporating the historic seaside resorts of Margate, Ramsgate, Broadstairs together with Westgate and Birchington and the rural villages of Minster, Monkton, Acol, Sarre and St Nicholas at Wade. It is an area that is isolated geographically, being surrounded by sea to the North East and South. Canterbury and Dover, the nearest large towns, are each 17 miles distant. London is 75 miles away, a two-hour journey by train. Road access has improved in recent years and a fast route meets with the M2 at Faversham, 25 miles away.

“East Kent has a number of wards which have an index of deprivation in the lowest 30% of the 8,414 wards in the United Kingdom. Some of these wards are comparable with the deprivation indices seen for some of the most deprived Wards in London”<sup>2</sup>. Thanet has ten of these Wards.

The area suffers economic deprivation, much of this is due to the closure of the Kent Coalfields as well as the decline of the seaside holiday in Britain. The public transport infrastructure is generally thought to be poor. Many of the large houses of Georgian and Victorian origin are now in multi-occupation. Property prices are generally lower than in most other places in the South East of England.

Thanet has a large aged population<sup>3</sup>, the highest in Kent, and a significant number of older LGBT people. It is generally accepted that 5% is a conservative estimate of the number of LGBT people in a population.

Total number of population	126,702
Number aged 60 years and over	34,386
Estimated number of LGBT older people @ 5% over 60	1,720

<sup>2</sup> Regional Research Summary: Indices of Deprivation 2000 (Number 31, 2000)

<sup>3</sup> Census by Office of National Statistics 2001

Many older people live in sheltered accommodation, residential and nursing homes. Figures from these organisations in Thanet form the basis of this Report.

These statistics would appear to have significant implications for service providers in the future.

**Office of National Statistics – Source 2001 Census**

<b>Population Figures</b>	<b>% of Population Aged 60-74</b>	<b>% of Population Aged 75 and Over</b>
Thanet	15.7	11.4
England & Wales	13.3	7.6

<b>Employment Status</b>	<b>% Retired</b>	<b>% of Housing Flats</b>
Thanet	17.5	24.4
England & Wales	13.6	19.2

- Thanet has almost 50% more retired people than the UK average.
- There is a high level of flat occupancy in Thanet, almost 30% more than the UK average.
- Compared to the UK average the population age-group 60-74 is significantly higher. This is even more exaggerated for the 75 plus age-group.

*Lgbt seniors suffer neglect on two fronts. They are invisible to mainstream service providers, ageing advocates and researchers, due to homophobia. And, society's ageism mirrored in the lgbt community often means lgbt seniors are shunned by their own culture as they age."*

SAGE – Senior Action in a Gay Environment (New York)  
A Fact Sheet for Funders (May 2001)

## THE QUESTIONNAIRE

In January 2003 a Community Worker employed by Thanet Community Development Trust advised a member of the group to attend a Funding Workshop organised by The Christian Housing Trust. A successful application was made to the Scarman Trust, who administer the “You and Your Community Millennium Award Scheme” to fund the distribution of a Questionnaire, and the publication of a Report on the results of that questionnaire.

- The aim of the Questionnaire was to discover what level of awareness exists of the needs of older LGBT people in Sheltered Housing, Residential Homes, Nursing Homes, Care Companies and Day Centres in Thanet.
  
- The Questionnaire was re-drafted several times and expert advice sought from a Regional Fieldwork Officer at Age Concern England, and from an adviser known to a Development Worker at Thanet Community Development Trust.
  
- The group sent out 149 Questionnaires (*Appendix 1*) with accompanying letter of explanation (*Appendix 2*) and stamped envelope to facilitate a reply.
  
- Questionnaires were sent to the Wardens of Sheltered Housing, Managers and Owners of Residential and Nursing Homes, Care Companies and Day Centres caring for people in Thanet.
  
- The group received 28 replies.
  
- This is a response of 18%, well over the 10% response typical of such a survey.

## AN OVERVIEW OF THE RETURNED QUESTIONNAIRES

	Sheltered Housing	Residential & Nursing Homes, Care Companies & Day Centres
Number of Questionnaires Sent	28	121
Number of Replies	16	11
% of Replies Received	57%	9%
Establishment ceased operating		1

## A DETAILED ANALYSIS OF THE REPLIES

The replies have been divided into two groups. Sheltered Housing is recorded separately from Residential/Nursing Homes, Care Companies and Day Centres because those resident in sheltered housing are independent in their own homes. Care Companies and Day Centres are often managed by the same companies who own and manage the former. The care offered in these establishments is more personal than the services provided by sheltered housing.

*“Considerable concerns were expressed about care provision and special housing. There was notable distrust about respect for their sexual identities and relationships in such contexts”.*

**Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Lives over 50**

Brian Heaphy, Andrew Yip and Debbie  
Thompson  
York House Pub. Nottingham 2003

Question 1 – *How many residents/tenants do you have?*

Question 2 – *How many of your residents/tenants are Male/Female?*

Question 1	Question 2	
Total	Male	Female
30	10	20
22	4	18
16	4	12
33	7	26
23	1	22
18	0	18
31	6	25
33	11	22
31	5	26
42	12	30
29	6	23
46	10	36
32	4	28
22	11	11
39	8	31
37	12	25
42	13	29
20	2	18
31	7	24
12	3	9
29	8	21
24	8	16
27	5	22
42	10	32
138	-	-
130	-	-
900	-	-
<b>Total 1,879</b>		

The total number of people being cared for by those who responded to the questionnaire was 1,879. Taking the generally accepted figure of 5% of the population being LGBT, indicates that at least 94 of these clients are LGBT.

## THE RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS 3 – 8

Q. 3 - *Do you have, or have you had, experience of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgendered people in your care or who are resident in your establishment?*

Answers	Sheltered Housing		Residential & Nursing Homes, Care Companies & Day Centres		All Responses	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Yes	5	31%	1	9%	6	22%
No	7	43%	7	63%	14	48%
Don't Know	4	25%	3	27%	7	30%

Of the replies from Sheltered Housing Schemes, 43% said they had never had experience of LGBT residents in their establishments but 31% said they had. Those who do not know amount to 25%

The replies from Residential and Nursing Homes, Care Companies and Day Care are not so positive. Only 9% of the respondents were aware that they had cared for, or were caring for, LGBT clients, and 54% were sure that they had not had, and did not have, LGBT clients. As many as 48% did not know.

**“There are few, if any, specifically ‘gay’ residential homes in the UK, which means that moving into residential care can be particularly traumatic for gay men and lesbian women, their friends and partners.”**

*Choosing Residential Accommodation: a guide for gay and lesbian partners, relatives and friends. – Alzheimers Society 2002*

Taking the responses to Question 3 as a whole, 22% had experience of dealing with older LGBT clients. There were 48% who were sure that they had not had LGBT clients, and 30% replied that they did not know.

Certain questions arise:

- How could 48% of the respondents be certain that they had not had LGBT clients?
- Do they ask their clients about their sexual orientation?
- Can they be sure that the reply is truthful?
- Would they be offended if they found the client had been untruthful?
- Are they sure that LGBT clients would feel safe to disclose their sexual orientation?
- Do the respondents make the assumption that LGBT people are easily identifiable?
- Do the respondents believe that LGBT people identify themselves readily?

It is important to know the answers to these questions, and also to know how heterosexual clients have responded to enquiries about their sexuality.

There is a need for -

- awareness training
- for information
- for understanding of LGBT clients.

When clients are dependent on service providers and their staff LGBT people need to feel safe to disclose their sexual orientation, their past or their present situation.

Those dealing with older LGBT clients need to be guided to find non-threatening ways to support LGBT clients in “coming out” and expressing their needs.

One respondent volunteered that they had employed a lesbian member of staff. Although this was obviously meant to be a helpful and supportive comment, service providers need to understand that some older LGBT people would find this situation uncomfortable, especially if they have been “in the closet” all their lives. It is a mistake to assume that LGBT people can identify each other, and that they are willing to be identified by each other.

- Relatives, eg. sons and daughters, siblings, might be unaware of a client’s sexual orientation.
- Clients might be selective in whom they wish to trust.

**“Same-sex couples can feel vulnerable when community staff visit their home and their personal living arrangements come under scrutiny. Mr N who cared for his partner of 30 years said ‘All the time people wanted to know who I was and why I was looking after him. The whole caring system for older people assumes that you’re in a straight relationship.’”**

*Opening Doors – Hazel Heath, Nursing Older People  
June 2002*

*Q. 4 – Do you think that elderly Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgendered people have needs that are different from or in addition to the rest of the population?*

Answers	Sheltered Housing		Residential & Nursing Homes, Care Companies & Day Centres		All Responses	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Yes	3	18%	0	0%	3	22%
No	8	50%	7	63%	15	55%
Don't Know	5	31%	4	36%	9	33%

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 high percentage in each category, who either deny or cannot understand the needs of LGBT older people, is not as disappointing as at first appears, when taking into consideration the lack of visibility of people who are LGBT.

- LGBT people need assurance that they will be supported and protected from homophobia.
- Carers must be made aware that the isolation of many LGBT people is exacerbated by ageing.
- More information is needed by service providers and their staff.

Additional Comments –

- *“it depends on client, all clients are treated as individuals”,*
- *“all residents are individuals, we like to tender to their personal needs whatever they may be”.*
- *“Because all should be treated with respect and given privacy and maintain dignity”.*

Positive responses like those quoted above were not usual. There was a confusion between “treating everyone the same” and equal opportunities.

If the question had referred to an ethnic minority or a minority religion, how would the respondents have answered?

**“Gay men and women in care homes can feel particularly isolated and it might be appropriate to look outside the home for friendship or support for them”.**

*‘Sex & Relationships: A guide for care homes’  
Alison Clarke with Les Bright and Chris Greenwood  
Counsel & Care 2002*

Q. 5 – *If yes, (to Q.4) are you aware of what those needs might be?*

Answers	Sheltered Housing	Residential & Nursing Homes, Care Companies & Day Centres	All Responses	
	Number	Number	Number	%
Yes	1	0	1	3%
No	2	0	2	6%

Only one respondent acknowledged and understood the different needs of older LGBT people.

The results of this question demonstrate -

- a need for service providers to find ways of asking about sexual orientation.
- A need to learn how to give confidence to LGBT people that the issue will be dealt with in a professional manner, rather than in whispers later on.

**Dislosing sexual orientation should not be treated as a shameful secret.**

Additional comments –

- *Discuss with client or support at time of introduction or monitoring.”*

**Staff need to learn how to make discreet enquiries about sexual orientation. It is not always easy for LGBT people to “come out” especially in new situations.**

**Some indication by Service Providers that they are “LGBT friendly” or “aim to be LGBT friendly” in their publicity material would be appreciated by LGBT people.**

Q. 6 – *Do you think your staff need advice, guidance or support in order to meet the needs of older Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual or Transgendered people?*

Answers	Sheltered Housing		Residential & Nursing Homes, Care Companies & Day Centres		All Responses	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Yes	9	56%	1	9%	10	37%
No	5	31%	7	63%	12	44%
Don't Know	2	12%	3	27%	5	18%

- The responses from Sheltered Housing Schemes is encouraging. Fifty six percent of respondents agreed that their staff need advice, guidance and support in order to meet the needs of older LGBT people.
- The responses from Residential/Nursing Homes, Care Companies and Day Care Centres is disappointing.
- The majority is either asking for more information, or open to being persuaded.
- The number of replies, 44% of all respondents, who are sure they want nothing to help them understand the needs of older LGBT people is a cause for concern.

**If the question had been asked about black and ethnic minorities the level of awareness would have been much higher. The different customs, expectations, ways of living – and dying – are understood to be different from the rest of the population. Work similar to that done against racial prejudice needs to be done to help older LGBT people lead happy and satisfying later years.**

Q. 7 – *Would you be willing to attend an event where these issues would be explored further?*

Answers	Sheltered Housing		Residential & Nursing Homes, Care Companies & Day Centres		All Responses	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Yes	9	56%	3	27%	12	37%
No	5	31%	5	45%	10	44%
Don't Know	2	12%	3	27%	5	18%

- The responses from Sheltered Housing Schemes is encouraging.
- Older LGBT people in Thanet can search optimistically for sheltered housing where they will feel safe and accepted.
- This positive lead may cause others to re-think and participate in opportunities for training or information.
- The difference between Sheltered Housing and Residential/Nursing Homes, Care Companies and Day Care Centres is a source of concern. The reason must be investigated.
- Older LGBT people are a source of anxiety or embarrassment for some people and information and training can address this situation.

Additional comments –

- *."We like to provide good care to all our clients. If possible to attend a delegate would attend".*
- *"Not necessary. Their care would not differ from anyone else's".*

Would these respondents -

- Allow religious rites such as Moslem fasting, or Jewish candles on Sabbath?
- Allow a celebration for a gay civil partnership, or a lesbian anniversary?
- Allow a same-sex couple to share a room in a Residential Home – with a double bed?
- Acknowledge next-of-kin requests despite opposition from relatives?
- Would staff be deterred from gossip?

**“After a lifetime of openness about their sexuality, lesbians and gay men face a new enemy: their age. Despite spending decades being out and proud, many older lesbians and gay men are having to hide their sexuality when they need care. And there is evidence they are being forced back into the closet because they fear homophobic reactions from care staff and other service users if they come out.”**

*‘Back in the Closet’*

*Anabel Unity Sale*

*Community Care – 5<sup>th</sup> June 2002*

Q. 8 – *Do you have an equal opportunities policy that includes sexuality/sexual orientation?*

Answers	All Responses	
	Number	%
Yes	25	93%
No	2	7%
Don't Know	0	0%

This response is encouraging provided the Equal Opportunities Policy is “live” and monitored and its meaning fully understood, eg: being “nice” to a gay man is not enough.

Additional comments –

- *“Gender yes, sexuality no. Will change it though”.*

Thank you!

- *“Required by National Care Standards and Employment Legislation”.*

**Employment legislation coming into force in December 2003 applies to employers but not to “goods and services”. This means that it would not be illegal for instance to turn down a gay man’s request to be cared for in a nursing home of his choice.**

## CONCLUSIONS

- Older LGBT people want and need to have their lifestyles valued.
- LGBT people do not necessarily make their needs known.
- LGBT people have fears about making their needs known.
- Fears go both ways – staff need to be given information about acceptable behaviour from all clients.
- Confidentiality needs to be guaranteed.
- LGBT people are not easily identified visually.
- Managers and staff must learn how to enquire about a client's sexual orientation.
- There is confusion in some respondents' between "equal opportunities" and "treating everyone alike".
- Indication by service providers that they are LGBT friendly is of paramount importance.
- There is an assumption that LGBT people working in these establishments are always happy to be identified and to work with LGBT clients.
- Neighbours or co-residents could also be a problem to LGBT clients.
- Training for staff to understand the problems, fear, experiences, hopes and needs of LGBT people is essential.

The responses indicate that Residential and Nursing Homes, Care Companies and Day Centres need more information. Embarrassment and fear on the part of some staff may have contributed to some negative responses to the questionnaire. Given the invisibility of LGBT people and their lifestyle, and the

cultural inheritance of negative attitudes towards sex, this is understandable.

However, there is an indication of a welcome level of awareness in Sheltered Accommodation in Thanet which is both surprising and encouraging. This goodwill and open-mindedness must be recognised and built upon in the future.

**“Oh, no, there are no gay people in this road.  
They are all old people along here.”**

*Relative of lesbian woman living in Thanet*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Mandatory training for management and staff of sheltered accommodation, residential homes, nursing homes, care companies and day centres to raise awareness.
- Publicity to be presented so that LGBT people are visible and included.
- “Live” and monitored equal opportunities policies.
- Some indication in literature and advertising material that sheltered accommodation, residential homes, nursing homes, care companies and day centres are LGBT friendly.

The excellent and positive attitudes demonstrated by some sheltered housing schemes should be publicised and developed in all service provision.

The honesty of the other respondents should be taken as an indication of the need for work to be done to overcome lack of information.

**“More and more I realise how much older people contribute to the diversity, richness and fun of life. Older lesbians and gay men have a wealth of knowledge, wisdom and experience to pass on to those of us who are younger”**

*Graham Norton – Opening Doors  
Report of the one-day conference  
held in London in April 2002*

## **APPENDIX**

## Equally Different

“Government estimates suggest that at least 5% of the adult population is lesbian or gay, this relates to 1.9 million people”

*(Full regulatory Impact Assessment for Sexual Orientation  
22 October 2002 Women & Equality Unit – Dept of Trade & Industry)*

1. How many residents/tenants do you have? \_\_\_\_\_
2. How many of your residents/tenants are Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_
3. Do you have, or have you had, experience of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgendered people in your care or who are resident in your establishment?  
Yes  No  Don't Know
4. Do you think that elderly Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgendered people have needs that are different from or in addition to the rest of the population?  
Yes  No  Don't Know
5. If yes, are you aware of what those needs might be?  
Yes  No  Don't Know
6. Do you think your staff need advice, guidance or support in order to meet the needs of older Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgendered people?  
Yes  No  Don't Know
7. Would you be willing to attend an event where these issues would be explored further?  
Yes  No  Don't Know
8. Do you have an equal opportunities policy that includes sexuality/sexual orientation?  
Yes  No

Name of Establishment: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Contact Person: \_\_\_\_\_

# Opening Doors in Thanet

## **An Organisation for Older Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgendered People**

### **Opening Doors in Thanet**

We are a group of older gay women and men, working together to address the needs of older lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgendered (lgbt) people in Thanet. The name of our organisation is derived from a one-day conference held in London by Age Concern England in April 2002, a report of which has already been circulated.

We are attempting to find out the sort of difficulties experienced by service-providers in Thanet who have lgbt clients, and have devised a questionnaire with this aim in mind. This project has been funded by the Scarman Trust who are administering the "*You and Your Community*" award scheme.

We would be grateful if you could give time to completing this questionnaire, and return the completed form to ODIT using the stamped, addressed envelope supplied. We would also be very pleased to receive any comments from you that you consider to be pertinent to our research. A report will be compiled on the results of this research, and will be circulated to all those receiving this questionnaire.

Please rest assured that all replies will be treated in the strictest confidence, and that any comments or suggestions will remain anonymous.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Yours sincerely

Secretary ODIT

Thanks are due to all who responded to the Questionnaire. It was a good response and the honesty of the replies is appreciated.

Thanks also to CD, CS, AR, CB, SD, AA, RN, DR and CG for help, support, advice, criticism, not to mention typing.

Thanks to "1<sup>st</sup> Impression", Ramsgate High Street for endless photocopying, to Thanet Community Development Trust for support, to Kent Friend and to PC John Pears.

But, most of all, thanks to those who read this Report and change their minds about a few things.