

Count Me In Too: LGBT community experiences in Brighton

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Summary

Geographers worked with local community group Spectrum to improve the lives of the lesbian, gay and bisexual community in Brighton, the city sometimes known as Britain's unofficial "gay capital"

Challenge

Spectrum, an LGBT Community Forum, expressed concerns that there were areas of poor or misinformed service provision in Brighton, despite its reputation as a tolerant and safe area for LGBT people. It also believed that some LGBT groups were particularly isolated and their needs were not addressed by service providers.

Solution

Research with LGBT people, service providers and others led by geographer Dr Kath Browne at the University of Brighton (now University College Dublin) aimed to build an understanding of LGBT experiences in Brighton, drawing out intersectional and spatial perspectives.

The project involved almost 900 participants in questionnaires, discussion groups and research creation.

The project found that while some LGBT people have benefitted from the introduction of the anti-discriminatory legislation and the tolerant 'urbanity' of the city of Brighton & Hove, others - particularly trans and bisexual people - continue to experience multiple forms of exclusion.

For example, more than three-quarters of Brighton's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people had been affected by hate crime. In addition, the project found that the needs of LGBT people in the areas of mental health, safety, housing, drugs and alcohol were also not being met.

Benefits

Policy insight

Count Me In Too helped authorities such as the Brighton & Hove City Council and the Sussex police understand the needs of their LGBT citizens.

Dr Browne commented "Through listening to people's stories in discussion groups, the study has reached people who have never before had their views heard...there are many specialists in criminology and housing but geographers can work across these areas".

The project was central to the development of local policies on alcohol community safety and domestic violence, and contributed directly to the UK's first local [LGBT specific housing policy](#).

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The Housing Strategy Manager for Brighton and Hove City Council said Count Me In Too “provided a vivid insight into the lives and experiences of the city's LGBT communities that we would not have got from our traditional engagement routes”.

Count Me In Too's findings and recommendations on mental health contributed to Brighton and Hove's first Suicide Prevention Strategy, 2008-11 and continues to inform the [draft 2018 strategy](#). The evidence for the need for LGBT-specific services underpinned the establishment of MindOut as an independent charity, informed practitioner debate and reshaped local service delivery to meet the needs of LGBT people.

In terms of physical health, Count Me In Too informed the Department of Health policy document [Be active, be healthy](#), showing why LGBT people might be deterred from physical activity; the Drug Policy Commission's work on the [impact of drugs on different minority groups](#); and the Cabinet Office's [Call to end violence against women and children](#). The Equalities and Human Rights Commission Report used the research to address homophobia in the UK and inform work on ageing and older people ([see reports](#)).

Better decision-making

The localised and participatory nature of the research was key to making these initiatives possible, and the opportunities to develop ground-breaking research that challenged key stereotypes, and engaged politicians and heads of service, were imperative to the impacts achieved in the area.

In achieving this, the project advanced the process of doing research with LGBT collectives, with [the project website](#) acting as a repository for research materials, engagement activities,

reports and summaries that other researchers and groups may continue to draw upon.

Further reading

Browne, K. and Bakshi, L. (2013) *Ordinary in Brighton? Lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans lives and activism*. Aldershot: Ashgate.