



AMACH! LGBT GALWAY LTD

CONSULTATION REPORT



AMACH VISION STATEMENT

Amach! LGBT Galway Ltd. aims to reflect equally the diversity within the LGBT community by encouraging positive participation from the community. We actively campaign to achieve a solid safe support structure for the LGBT community in Galway.

AMACH! AIMS

- To ensure that the Committee reflects the LGBT community, works in an effective manner and is both transparent and accountable.
- To support the development of an accessible and safe Resource Centre that can be utilised by the LGBT community
- To work towards supporting the provision of services for the LGBT community.
- To source funding for future development through grant applications and fundraising event.
- To support the LGBT community to have a voice in influencing and brining about changes in LGBT issues

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- see the website www.amachlgbt.com
- contact by email info@amachlgbt.com
- or find us on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Amach-LGBT-Galway/113113445418635>

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FOREWORD & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Amach! LGBT Galway LTD is a voluntary organisation that actively campaigns to achieve a solid, safe support structure for the LGBT community in Galway. We undertook this community consultation to inform the development of a strategic planning process. We welcome the priority recommendation of this process, which is to build on the commitment in the Galway City Development Plan to provide for an LGBT Resource Space from which a wide range of supports and services can operate. We welcome it because we know that it is truly needed. It is time for Galway to acknowledge that it has a healthy, vibrant and dynamic LGBT community, one that needs to be resourced and supported to achieve full equality. While some may argue that the LGBT community doesn't need its own Resource Space, we argue that society still displays unacceptably high levels of discrimination towards the LGBT community, making many feel unsafe. The LGBT community needs a space where we can safely claim our identity and work to provide services and supports to address the needs highlighted in this and other research. We see the Resource Space as providing the hub from which a range of such supports and services can be provided and we call on the communities, agencies and organisations in Galway to work with us to provide a Resource Space that we can all be proud of.

Amach! LGBT Galway Ltd would like to extend a heart filled thank you to all who took the time to participate in our on-line survey and consultation process. Thank you to the LGBT family resource centre network, Gort Family Resource Centre, Clann Family Resource Centre Oughterard and shOUT! LGBT youth group. Also a big thank you to Poul Walsh Olesen LGBT Diversity Development Worker for all your support!, and to Ann Irwin our independent consultant for your hard work and sensitivity throughout the process. Thank you to all for your continued support. The information from this report will guide the work of Amach! over the next 3 years.

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INTRODUCTION & METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

In late 2011, Amach! Ltd successfully applied to the Community Foundation of Ireland for funding to support the development of a Strategic Plan. In February/March 2012, Amach! undertook a consultation process with members of the LGBT community and supports of the community in order to inform the establishment of goals and the development of strategies. The overall aim of the consultation process was to give members, friends and family of the LGBT community an opportunity to:

- Identify needs for support that are currently not addressed
- Inform themes and actions for inclusion in the Amach! Strategic Plan, as well as the Inter-agency Plan for Development of LGBT Supports and Services in Galway City and County.
- Share ideas and suggestions

METHODOLOGY

The consultation methodology was based on the following considerations;

- People living in various geographical locations in Galway City and County should all be given an opportunity to have their voice heard, and
- Special attention should be given to 'hard to reach groups', including LGBT people who have not yet come out.

An on-line survey was developed and disseminated widely. A total of 210 responses were received to the survey. Of these 142 or 69% were members of the LGBT community and 53 or 26% were heterosexual¹. In addition, three Focus Groups were held in Oughterard, Gort and Galway City and an additional Focus Group was held with young members of the LGBT community, facilitated by shOUT LGBT youth group. This brief report provides a summary of the main results of the consultation process.

¹ A friend, family or supporter of the LGBT community

SECTION 1 AGE, GENDER & LOCATION

The first set of questions asked a number of background question such as age, gender and location of the respondents. A total of 129 or 62% of respondents were female, 76 or 37% were male and 2 or 1% were transgender. The majority of respondents were between the ages of 18 and 45 years, with the largest category being in the 26-35 age group. Though the number of older people that completed the on-line questionnaire was relatively small, discussions at the Focus Groups strongly suggest that there are a considerable number of older LGBT people living in Galway city and county.

TABLE 1 AGE

Age	Percent	Count
Under 18	1%	1
18-25	21%	44
26-35	31%	64
36-45,	23%	48
46-55	19%	39
56-65	5%	10
Over 65	1%	1
<i>answered question</i>		207

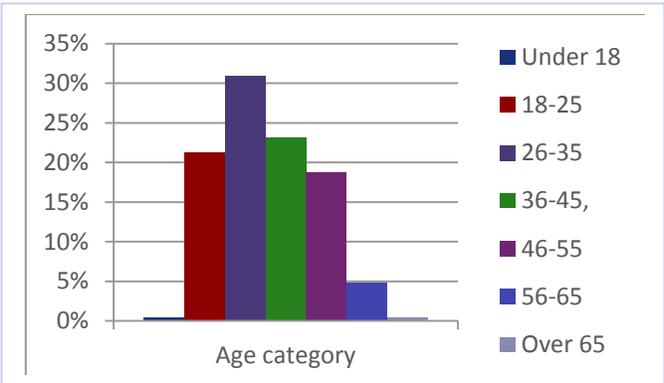
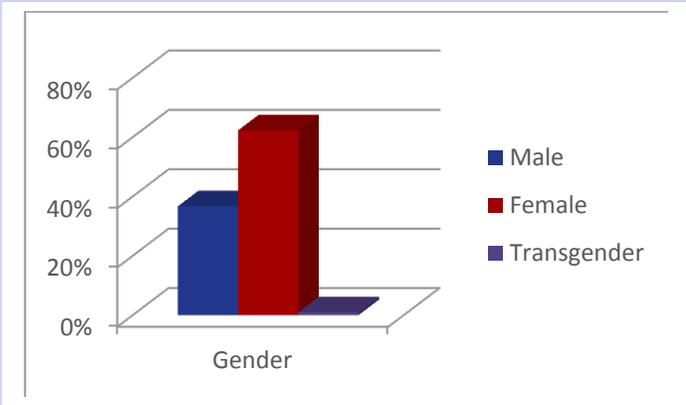


TABLE 2 GENDER

Gender	Percent	Count
Male	37%	76
Female	62%	129
Transgender	1%	2
<i>answered question</i>		207



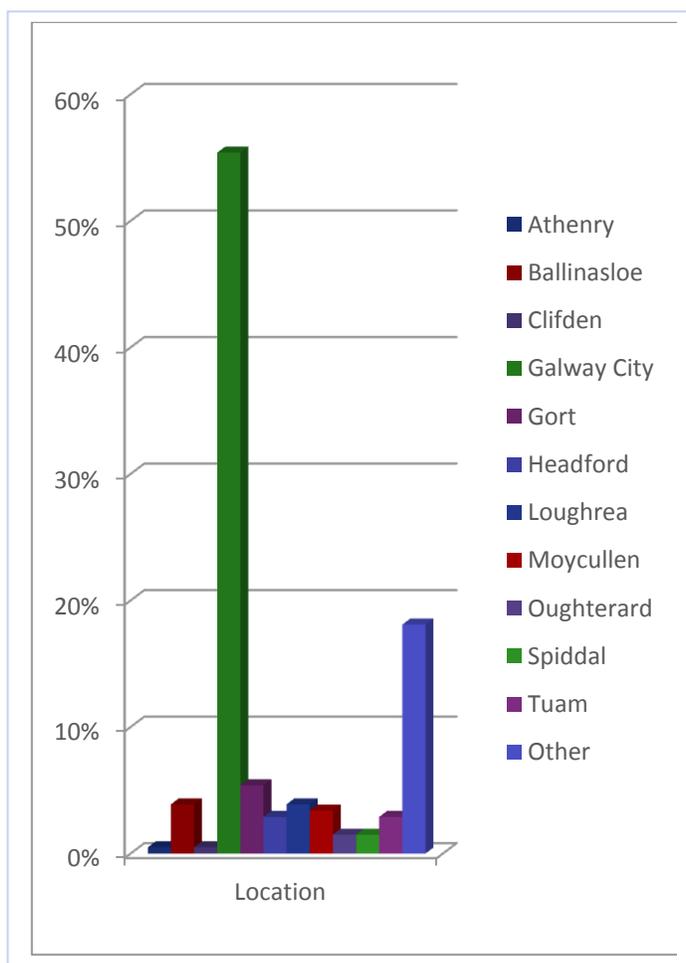
The majority of respondents (113 or 55%) stated that the city/town/village nearest to where they live is Galway city. The next most common were Gort, Ballinasloe and Loughrea. Other areas cited were:

- Castlebar, Co. Mayo
- Athlone
- Ballyhaunis
- Carlow
- Carna
- Co Cork
- Craughwell
- Dublin
- Co Donegal
- Ennis
- Killarney
- Limerick Kerry - daughter living in Galway
- Mayo
- Portumna
- Sligo
- Westport

The distribution of the population suggests the need to take into account the needs of rural, as well as urban dwellers. LGBT people living in urban areas are more likely to have access to social activities and support networks. The discussions at the Focus Groups confirmed the isolation that can be experienced by many, particularly those living in rural areas. The lack of rural transport is a compounding factor and the needs of those living in rural areas and those without transport must be considered.

TABLE 3 LOCATION

City/town/village nearest to where you live	Percent	Count
Athenry	1%	1
Ballinasloe	4%	8
Clifden	1%	1
Galway City	55%	113
Gort	5%	11
Headford	3%	6
Loughrea	4%	8
Moycullen	3%	7
Oughterard	2%	3
Spiddal	2%	3
Tuam	3%	6
Other	18%	37
<i>answered question</i>		204



SECTION 2 SEXUALITY & 'OUT'

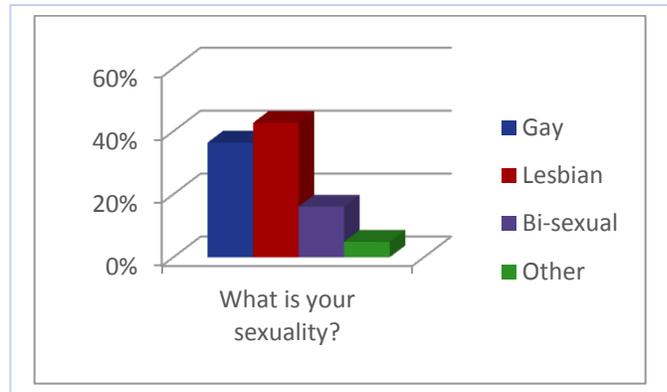
2.1 SEXUALITY

The next section of the survey dealt with the issue of sexuality and whether respondents were 'out'. The tables and charts below illustrate the answers. Sixty-one or 43% of respondents stated that they were lesbian, 52 or 35% stated that they were gay and 23 or 15% stated that they were bi-sexual. Those that elaborated on their 'other' gave further descriptions of their sexuality.

used to consider myself a gay man, now I'm a transgender woman who likes men

TABLE 4 SEXUALITY

Sexuality	Percent	Count
Gay	36%	52
Lesbian	43%	61
Bi-sexual	16%	23
Other	5%	7
answered question		143



2.2 OUT

In answer to a question about whether they were 'out', the majority of respondents (124 or 84%) stated that they were, 10 or 7% stated that they were 'not out' and 14 or 9% chose the 'other' category. Of those that were 'out', the majority (84 or 60%) are 'out to everybody', with smaller numbers of respondents 'out to close friends or family only'.

Being 'out' was fairly uniform across the gender, with males slightly more likely to be 'out to everyone' than females, who were slightly more likely to be 'out to family only' or 'out to family and close friends only'. When analysed across the age groups, the majority of all age groups stated that they were 'out to everyone', except in the under 18 category where the one respondent stated that s/he was 'out to close friends only'. Just over half of 26-35 year olds and 36-45 year olds were 'out to close friends' or 'out to family and friends only'.

TABLE 5 ARE YOU OUT?

Are you out?	Percent	Count
Yes	84%	124
No	7%	10
Other	9%	14
answered question		148

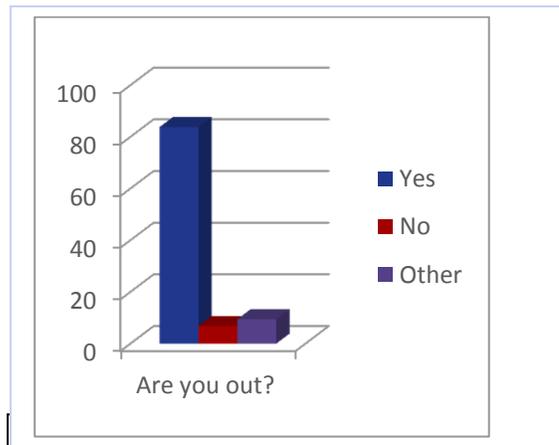
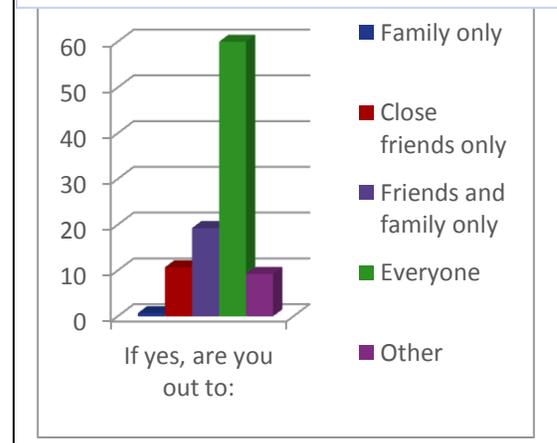


TABLE 6 ARE YOU OUT TO?

Are you out to:	Percent	Count
Family only	1%	1
Close friends only	11%	15
Friends and family only	19%	27
Everyone	60%	84
Other	9%	13
answered question		140



SECTION 3 CHILDREN

Survey participants were asked a number of questions with regards to children. Twenty per cent of respondents stated that they have children. Of these, 52% (or 23) stated that their children are their biological children. Sixteen of 36% percent of people stated that their children lived with them and 43% stated that they did not live with them. Of those that indicated *other* to this question the majority said that their children were now adults. Of those that answered *No* to living with their children, 41% were in regular contact with them. However, the same number of respondents stated that they were not in regular contact with their children.

TABLE 7 CHILDREN

Do you have children?	Percent	Count
Yes	20%	29
No	80%	115
Other	0%	0
<i>answered question</i>		144

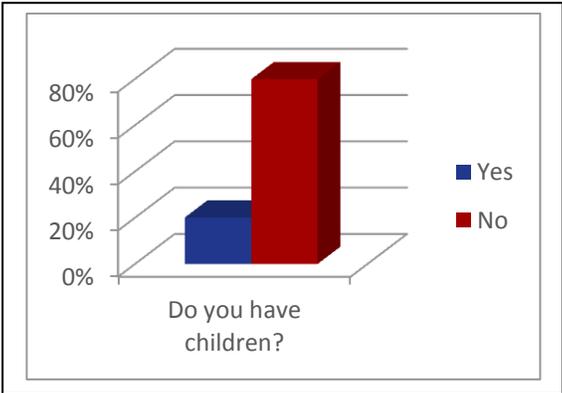


TABLE 8 BIOLOGICAL CHILDREN

Are they your biological children?	Percent	Count
Yes	52%	23
No	32%	14
Other	16%	7
<i>answered question</i>		44

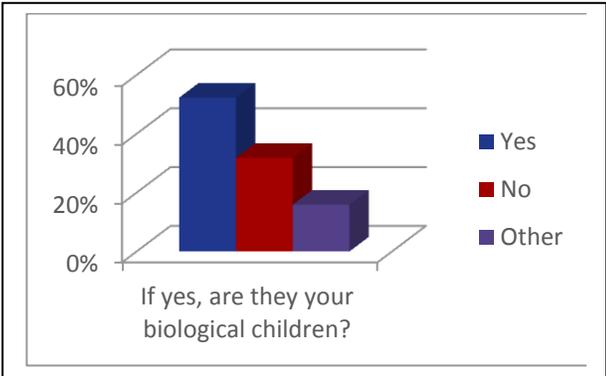
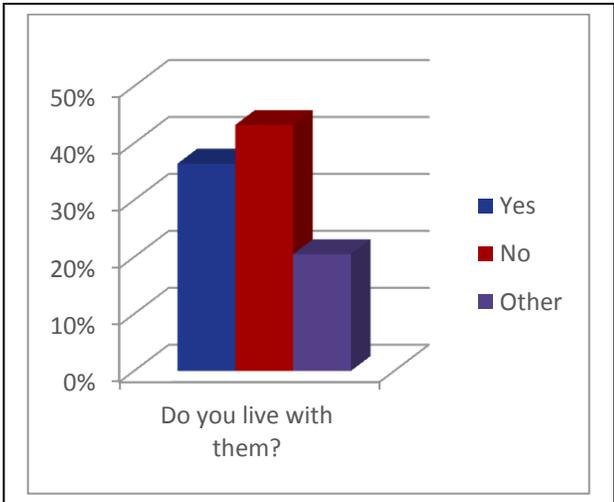


TABLE 9 DO YOU LIVE WITH THEM?

Do you live with them?	Percent	Count
Yes	36%	16
No	43%	19
Other	21%	9
<i>answered question</i>		44



Women were slightly more likely to have children than men or transgender people, and the majority of those that stated they have their biological children were women. Women were also far more likely to live with their children, and if they did not live with them, were far more likely to be in regular contact with them. People in the age categories 26-45 years were more likely to be living with their children than other age categories.

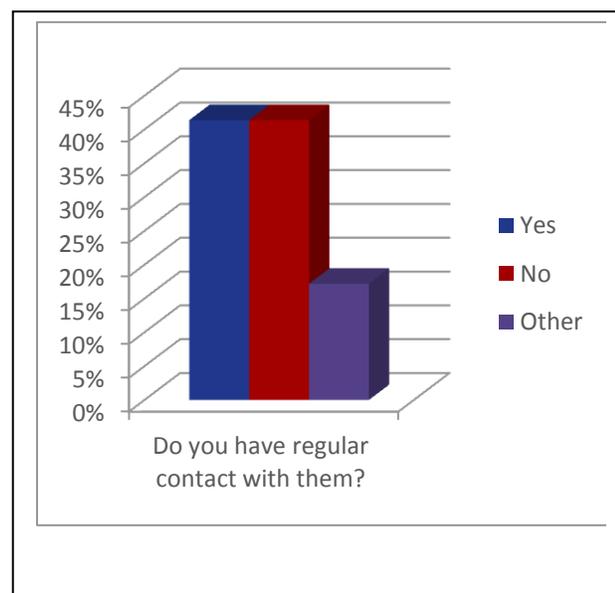
Children and parenting were significant topics of discussion at the Focus Groups. One of the points made was in relation to maternity services. It was stated that the assessment questionnaire that every expectant mother completes on their first visit to the ante-natal clinic does not include a question on membership of the LGBT community or sexual orientation. This can lead to situations where the expectant mother is compelled to constantly explain that she has a same sex partner and to be constantly 'coming out'.

In addition, there were detailed discussions about the lack of support for those in a same sex partnership and parenting. The difficulty in identifying others in the same situation with a view to developing peer support was mentioned.

The issue of losing contact with children and families was also discussed. Some related experiences of families deliberately rejecting them after they decided to acknowledge their identity and came out. These were poignant and heartfelt accounts and it was acknowledged that this can be one of the contributing factors to members of the LGBT community experiencing depression and/or misusing alcohol and drugs in an attempt to cope with the situation.

TABLE 10 REGULAR CONTACT

If no, do you have regular contact with them?	Percent	Count
Yes	41%	12
No	41%	12
Other	17%	5
<i>answered question</i>		29



SECTION 4 HOMOPHOBIA

4.1 EXPERIENCES

The on-line survey asked a number of questions in relation to homophobia and homophobic motivated bullying. Almost 6 in every 10 respondents reported having experienced homophobic bullying at some stage in their lives. The vast majority of experiences (95%) were verbal but a significant 27% of experiences involved physical bullying. A number of respondents experienced both verbal and physical bullying.

TABLE 11 HOMOPHOBIC BULLYING

Have you ever experienced homophobic abuse/bullying?	Percent	Count
Yes	57%	80
No	40%	57
Other	3%	4
<i>answered question</i>		141

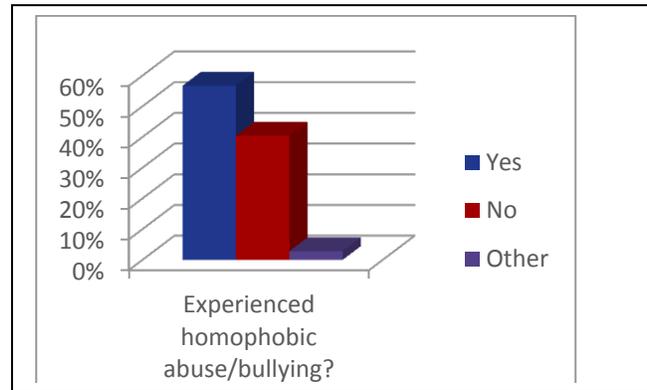
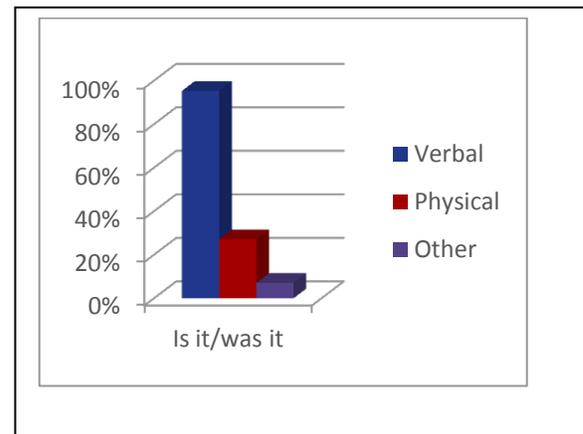


TABLE 12 NATURE OF BULLYING

If yes, is it/was it	Percent	Count
Verbal	95%	81
Physical	27%	23
Other	7%	6
<i>answered question</i>		85

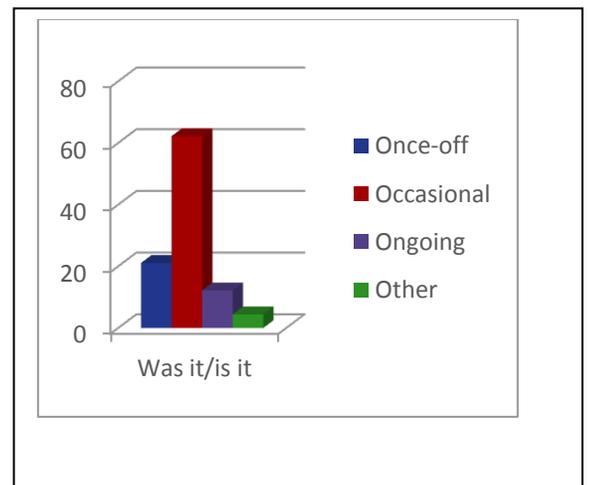


Both and ended up in hospital

When asked about the frequency of these experiences, the majority of respondents (62%) reported experiencing homophobic bullying 'occasionally', with a further 12% of respondents stating that their experiences were or are 'ongoing'.

TABLE 13 FREQUENCY

Was it/is it	Response Percent	Response Count
Once-off	21	19
Occasional	62	56
Ongoing	12	11
Other	4	4
Total	100	90

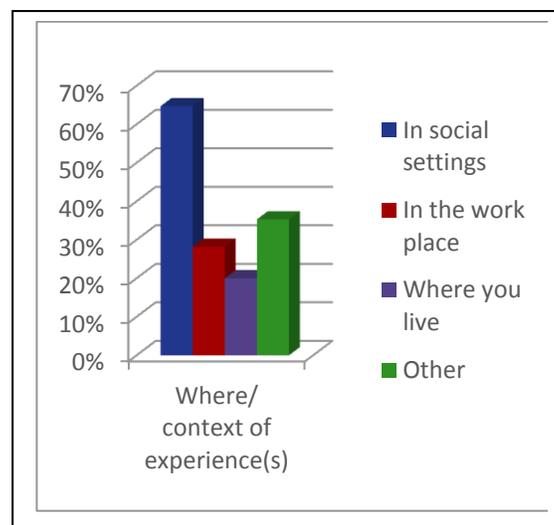


The majority of experiences of bullying motivated by homophobia took place in social settings. However, a significant proportion (28%) took place in workplace settings and a further 20% reported experiences 'where they live'.

TABLE 14 SETTING

Where/in what context your experience(s) took place	Percent	Count
In social settings	65%	55
In the work place	28%	24
Where you live	20%	17
Other (please specify)	35%	30
<i>answered question</i>		85

A further analysis of the on-line survey suggests that men are more likely to experience homophobic bullying than women, with 72% of men and 46% of women reporting some form of bullying. Though the number of transgender respondents to the on-line survey was small (two), 100% indicated that they had experienced homophobic bullying. Men are also almost twice as likely as women to experience physical bullying, with all transgender respondents indicating that they had experienced physical bullying. For men, women and transgender people, the experiences were most likely to happen in social settings, followed by the workplace and the place where they lived.



being treated differently, like second class citizen.

The discussions at the Focus Groups indicated that though some reported that it has generally improved over the past number of years, homophobia and homophobic bullying remains an issue. Some reported feeling that the attitude has 'flipped' and now there is a sense of shock if someone is overtly homophobic. Others expressed the belief that Ireland is less homophobic than other societies.

Other participants were not entirely in agreement and reported attacks, threats, destruction of property and incidents of intimidation. Strikingly, many spoke of the threat and fear of incidents being almost as bad as the incidents themselves. They spoke of almost constantly having to be wary of situations, particularly new situations, and living with the threat of discrimination, bullying or violence. This was particularly poignant in relation to young people who spoke of the need for safety in relation to claiming their identity with peers and others. Many of the participants reported developing coping and deflection mechanisms to avoid or minimise potential encounters, including hiding or denying their identity or sexuality, avoiding areas or situations, preparing retorts to deflect the situation and sometimes having to run to avoid danger and violence.

The Focus Groups also discussed the issue of discrimination and stated that many LGBT people, and particularly transgender people, faced discrimination, homophobia and transphobia in many areas of life. Many spoke of this impacting on employment opportunities, therefore having an impact on their ability to earn a living. There was a discussion regarding the slow progress in some areas and an acknowledgement that there was a challenge in reversing generations of homophobia.

The narrative responses received to the survey and the Focus Group discussions indicated that a substantial number of people experienced bullying in schools. While the majority of the participants in the area-based Focus Groups left school

some time ago, the negative experiences of the education system were still very apparent. The Focus Group with young people strongly suggests that problems in schools still exist. It focused on the levels of homophobia and homophobic bullying in schools stating that it is an issue that should be dealt with by more serious consequences in schools. They spoke of homophobia and bullying as a lack of equality for LGBT students. They further stated that not many people teaching Social Personal and Health Education will talk about anything related to LGBT. There was a general consensus that there is insufficient attention given to LGBT issues, and discrimination and homophobia is still widespread within schools.

One person in the on-line survey touched on double discrimination or the intersection between homophobia and other forms of discrimination, stating that he or she had experienced bullying motivated by both racism and homophobia.

The same respondent also stated that he or she had experienced racism from others members of the LGBT community. This issue was also discussed in the Focus Groups, with participants mentioning the fact that many Traveller LGBT people often face discrimination within the Traveller community and double discrimination on the basis of their ethnicity and sexuality in the wider community. It was also stated that Travellers and other ethnic minorities often face discrimination on the basis of their ethnicity from other members of the LGBT community. Transgender people reported often experiencing discrimination from within the LGBT community, as well as from the wider community. The issue of ensuring accessibility for LGBT people with a disability was also raised as an issue.

*house attacked, windows broken,
homophobic graffiti at workplace.
communal hysteria generally*

4.2 REPORTING

TABLE 15 REPORTING

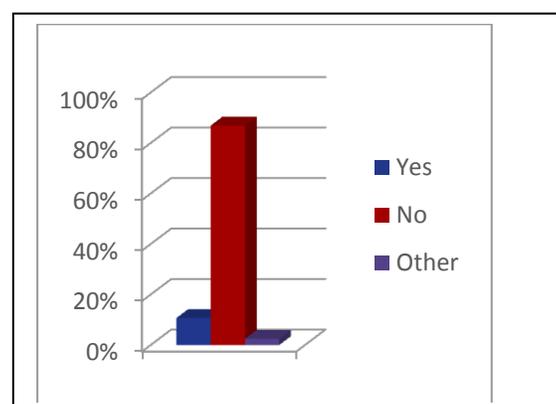
Did you report the incident(s) to the Gardaí?	Percent	Count
Yes	11%	9
No	87%	73
Other	2%	2
<i>answered question</i>		84

When asked whether they had reported the incident(s) to the Gardaí, the vast majority (87%) of respondents stated that they had not reported, with only 11% stating that they had. Reporting incidents to Gardaí, or not as the case may be, was fairly uniform across the genders. When asked why they did not report the incident to the Gardaí, the responses fell into a number of categories:

- Believed that the matter would stop or resolve itself;
- Not wanting to 'escalate' the situation or make the situation worse *or* believing that it would make the situation worse;
- Family advised them not to pursue the matter;
- Believing that the matter was not serious enough to warrant Garda involvement;
- Believing that the Gardaí would not treat the matter appropriately;
- Previous negative experiences of reporting to the Gardaí acting as a deterrent;
- The incident(s) was dealt with in another way – either by the school or taking a case to the Equality Tribunal.

For those that did report incidents to Gardaí, the methods of dealing with the incidents varied to no action being taken, the Gardaí visiting to assess damages and the Gardaí speaking to the perpetrators or giving them verbal warnings. One respondent stated that though the Gardaí understood the outcome of the experience, damage to property, they failed to understand the seriousness of the motivation, homophobia.

Discussions at the Focus Groups indicated that the participants felt that the Gardaí were generally supportive. A number of respondents stated that they report all experiences to the Gardaí and believe that they are handled very well by them, often going to speak to the perpetrators and warning them against further transgressions.



Occasional comments about "you people" or having the word "dyke" shouted from a moving car, while unacceptable, wouldn't merit a Garda investigation.

I did not feel it would be taken seriously

It didn't seem to merit further action, was widespread in school

The 2 community Gardaí at 2 different places where I lived, although very understanding of the situation as far as damage to my property was concerned, the frustration, humiliation and upset, when it came to addressing it for what it was, homophobia, they did not have an understanding and were at a loss as to what to do. One advised to ignore it and it would go away. I moved shortly after.

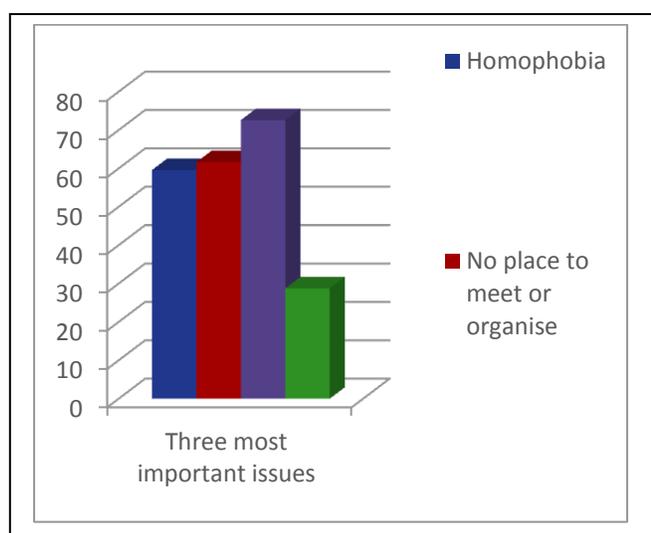
SECTION 5 ISSUES

5.1 IDENTIFYING THE ISSUES

One of the key areas of exploration, and the main reason for undertaking the consultation process, was to identify the issues currently affecting the LGBT community in Galway City and County. The responses indicated a variety of issues.

TABLE 16 ISSUES

Three most important issues for the LGBT community in Galway City and County?	Percent	Count
Homophobia	60	87
No place to meet or organise	62	90
Lack of education about LGBT issues in the education system	73	106
Other	29	42
<i>answered question</i>		146



The on-line survey asked respondents to rate a number of issues – *homophobia*, *no place to meet or organise* and *lack of education about LGBT issues in the education system*. Lack of education about LGBT issues was the most important issue for respondents, followed by ‘*no place to meet or organise*’ and ‘*homophobia*’. The narrative responses indicated that many believe that lack of education and awareness about the LGBT community permeates all other aspects of life and further believe that enhanced education would contribute to enhanced acceptance and support for members of the community. Other narrative responses included:

- Isolation;
- Mental health issues;
- Lack of information for supports that are available and central place that provides information and support to the LGBT community;
- Lack of support for members of the LGBT community trying to come out;
- Lack of support for the families of LGBT people who are coming out or out;
- Lack of support for members of the LGBT community whose family is not supportive;
- Lack of understanding and support in work for different types of families and relationships;
- Lack of places to meet outside of the pub and club scene;
- Lack of support for older and younger members of the community;
- Lack of opportunities for interacting with the straight community;
- Lack of LGBT specific information on health, social welfare, legal and other issues;
- Lack of visible role models and leaders;
- Transport from rural areas.

Galway LGBT Resource Centre. Would love to see a Galway version of Outhouse.

It should be on curriculum right from primary school as this was when my son first got bullied when he was about 7.

The discussions at the Focus Groups added more detail to some of the issues highlighted. Isolation and loneliness, for example, were common experiences, with a number relating sometimes harrowing accounts of isolation and loneliness, which they linked directly to the fact that they were LGBT. Participants spoke of being shunned and ignored by families and even by their children. Participants spoke of the fear of aging and the increasing sense of isolation that this may bring. Many spoke of the levels of mental ill health and depression within the community, often as a result of this, and the fact that many constantly live with oppression and the fear of discrimination and homophobia.

The accepted LGBT pub and club scene was an issue that was must discussed. For a significant number of Focus Group participants, the pub and club scene is not appropriate to their needs and there is an absence of alternative opportunities and venues from which to organise, meet, socialise and network.

Transport and the lack of rural transport was also a feature of the discussions. It was acknowledged that members of the LGBT community live in all parts of Galway city and county. While those living in or with access to urban areas, particularly Galway city, have access to some levels of services and support networks, those living in rural areas, particularly if they have no access to transport, have none. This is an area of concern for many of the research participants.

It was also acknowledged that it is more difficult to be open about sexuality in rural areas. There are fewer opportunities to identify and network with other members of the LGBT community in rural areas, and attitudes are generally considered to be more hard-line against LGBT in rural areas.

Younger members of the LGBT community spoke of the need for a place to meet where they did not have to be concerned that their identity might put them in danger. They also spoke of the need for one-to-one support for young LGBT people and better information provision on issues that affect them, such as positive mental health, sexuality workshops, transgender and transitioning. Opportunities to meet with other LGBT people was mentioned, specifically to talk about experiences of coming out and participants felt that links between older and younger LGBT people would be beneficial in that area. Workshops and support for parents and guardians and for supportive friends was also mentioned.

Supportive/accepting places to go to

Older LGBT talking to younger LGBT about their experiences – establish links between older and younger LGBT

A place to chill and be proud of being LGBTQ without having to worry about any dangers

I believe having an LGBT building or resource with street side advertising could be beneficial in legitimising the LGBT community in Galway

a place in the community would mean LGBT would be embraced and included

One of the key issues that emerged was the lack of information specific to the LGBT community such as health information, information for LGBT parents and information for families supporting members of their family to come out. There was general consensus that the community needs what was variously referred to as a resource centre or resource space, from which a wide range of activities and actions could be planned and organised, such as AA meetings², social groups, education groups, etc.

² A number of Focus Group participants stated that they had experienced considerable homophobia at AA meetings and would like to see meetings specifically for the LGBT community.

5.2 ADDRESSING THE ISSUES

When asked to elaborate and indicate what ways these issues might be addressed, responses were varied but the essence of many was the need for a focal point or Resource Space from which a range of services, supports and activities could be organised. They included the following:

- Provision of a drop-in centre that would be a place to meet outside of the pub and club scene and provide a range of services and supports;
- The promotion of better education and supports within the education system, particularly in relation to challenging homophobic bullying;
- Social activities such as book clubs, cooking, film evenings; women's groups, men's groups;
- Activity based activities such as walking, hiking;
- Health related activities, such as talks on transgender health, mental health;
- Supports for the families of LGBT people, particularly when they are coming out;

... but my main problem in Galway is that the only stuff there is here is pubs and clubs. Anything, anything, that would not involve loud music and big crowds would be a big help for me to meet other people. The youth group does great stuff, but I am too old :(

Global Solidarity - campaigning for rights in contexts of human rights abuses in Ireland and abroad...and for LGBT people in the asylum process claiming asylum on grounds of homophobia

Respondents were asked to rate in order of importance the initiatives they would like to see Amach! getting involved in. The majority of respondents rated the following as 'extremely important':

- Awareness campaigns
- Befriending and peer support
- Information provision
- Advocacy and influencing policy

Considering this organisation is relatively localised, its aims should reflect that. An advocacy movement would be better suited to a larger group. An information and support group would be such an amazing aim for this group!

I think if we meet our needs we are healthier and happier and that feeds back into all of the relationships we are involved in - I think it would break the sense of isolation I have felt at times, be a safe space and also a place where fun and connection and empowerment happen.

I really think the most important is securing a venue. I think that would give members in the community the opportunity to ask for and to offer services in areas of interest to them.

SECTION 6 RESOURCE SPACE

When asked whether they would use an LGBT Resource Space, the majority of respondents (70%) stated that they would, with a majority of respondents (59%) indicating that they would use it a few times a month or more.

TABLE 17 RESOURCE SPACE

Would you use an LGBT Resource Space?	Percent	Count
Yes	70%	104
No	19%	28
Other	11%	17
<i>answered question</i>		149

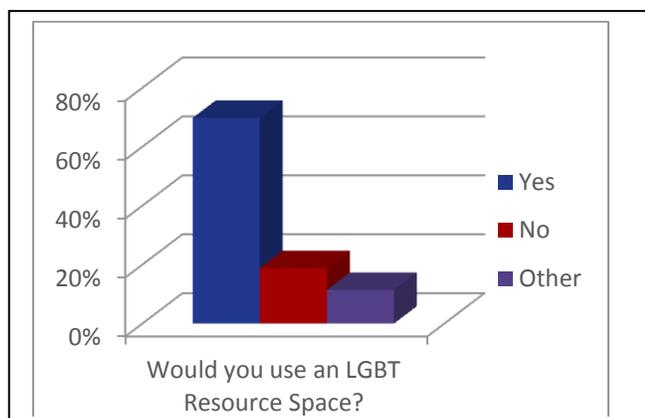
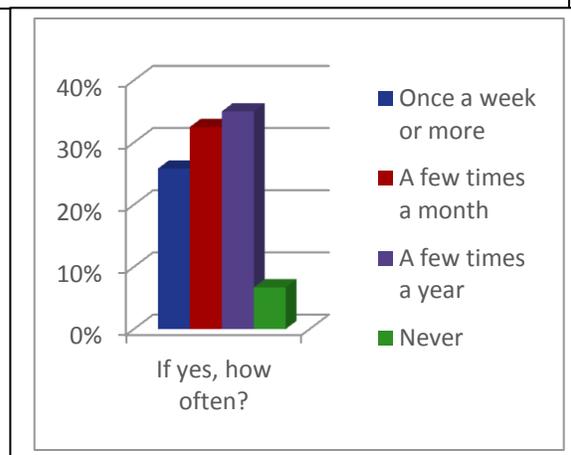


TABLE 17 RESOURCE SPACE FREQUENCY OF USE

If yes, how often?	Percent	Count
Once a week or more	26%	31
A few times a month	33%	39
A few times a year	35%	42
Never	7%	8
<i>answered question</i>		120



When asked what benefits an LGBT Resource Space would bring to the LGBT and wider community, the responses were very varied, indicating that such a resource would have many uses. The responses included:

- A safe place to meet that is outside of the pub and club scene;
- A centralised location for the provision of information on a wide range of issues ;
- A resource to other community organisations seeking to engage with the LGBT community;
- A visible place for members of the LGBT community not familiar with Galway;

Depends on what it would entail.

As I am not LGBT myself I would go to it if invited by my LGBT friends

Awareness, a safe space, a home away from home, educational/informative space

Respondents believe that the provision of such a visible resource would go some way to supporting the LGBT community to claim their legitimate space in the city and would serve to break down the isolation felt by many in the community.

SECTION 7 HEALTH

While not a separate area of exploration in the on-line survey, the issue of health, mental and physical, was a recurring one throughout the consultation process. Lack of information specific to the health of the LGBT community was a significant issue for many. Transgender women's access to Breast Check was one of the issues discussed and it was stated that many transgender women may not realise that they should be screened for breast cancer. Negative experiences of transgender women using breast screening services were shared and it was stated that medical and other staff of screen services need to be made aware of the issues relating to transgender women and be training in how to deal with those issues sensitively.

Cervical screening for lesbian women was also discussed and it was stated that many lesbian women are unaware of the necessity of cervical screening. The absence of a central point for information compounds these difficulties.

Mental health was a major issue and talking point throughout the consultation. Many of the participants spoke about the poor mental health of many people in the LGBT community. Many LGBT issues lead to poor mental health, including:

- For those not 'out', the experience of living with the 'secret' of being LGBT;
- Negative experiences when coming out to friends and families;
- Often losing contact with close friends and family as a result of LGBT identity;
- Continuous exposure, or the fear/threat of exposure, to discrimination, homophobia or homophobic bullying;
- Isolation, particularly in rural areas;

Excessive use of alcohol and drugs as coping mechanisms can often compound the problems for members of the LGBT facing one or more of the issues. Supports for people wanting to address drug and alcohol misuse were negatively experienced by some members of the LGBT community, with many suggesting that LGBT, AA specific meetings are needed.

SECTION 8 SUPPORT & INVOLVEMENT

The on-line questionnaire asked a final series of questions in relation to getting involved in or supporting the work of Amach!. Over 40% of respondents stated that they would be willing to get involved with the work of Amach! When asked how they might do this, respondents suggested a range of ways, including using their own skills to offer workshops, participate in a befriending service and general support. The majority of those that indicated they would be willing to get involved are willing to participate on a regular basis. This indicates that there is an untapped pool of skilled people willing to get involved in various activities but there are currently few opportunities for them to so do.

I'm trained as a reflexologist - if there were a space, i would certainly offer treatments - id be interested in offering workshops on areas I'm interested in and seeing if others would be interested too.

I have experience to offer of being actively involved in the LGBT community over the years, and from doing voluntary work for other organisations

SECTION 9 COMMUNICATION

The final question that was asked was in relation to communication. The responses indicated that the majority of respondents found Facebook the most useful medium of contact and information, followed by the Amach! website.

What are the best ways for you to hear about what activities Amach! is involved in?

Answer Options	Percent	Count
On the Web - www.amachlgbt.com	48%	63
Facebook	62%	81
Email/circular	47%	62
Text	19%	25
Other	6%	8

SECTION 10 SUMMARY, COMMENT & RECOMMENDATIONS

This brief survey sought to consult with the LGBT community in Galway City and County on the issues currently facing the community and ways or initiatives that they believed might address the issues. What the survey has shown is that, despite many improvements, considerable work remains to be done to enable the LGBT community to feel truly equal. The following is a summary of and comment on the issues and recommendations where appropriate.

AGE & LOCATION

The results of the consultation process suggest that the needs across the lifecycle must be taken into account when planning services and supports with the LGBT community. Younger people may need support to identify their sexuality and to come out. While support groups for young people are crucial in this regard, it is also important that they have the opportunities to mix with members of the LGBT community of all ages. Support must also be provided to families who in turn want to support their LGBT family member. Support for young people who do not have supportive families is also needed.

Supports for members of the community of working age must also be considered. The research suggests that those in the middle age groups are in need of support in relation to parenting, health and a range of other issues, as well as needing a place to meet and congregate that is outside of the pub and club scene. Discrimination in the workplace is an issue for many of this age group and initiatives to promote LGBT friendly work places should be encouraged.

Though the number of people aged over 56 years of age that completed the on-line survey was relative small, the discussions at the Focus Groups confirmed that there are a considerable number of LGBT older people living in Galway city and county. Isolation is a significant issue for a considerable number of LGBT people, and, as other research³ has suggested, that older LGBT people (over 55 years) are more likely to be single, live alone and less likely to have children or to see biological family members on a regular basis. This was confirmed by the discussions held as part of this consultation process and the particular needs of older people, including support to develop and sustain social networks outside of the known pub and club scene, is crucial.

Location is another key factor for many LGBT people. This research has suggested that though the concentration of the community is in Galway city, there are members of the LGBT community living in all areas of Galway City and County. Many experience *geographical isolation* on the basis of their location, as well as *social isolation* as a result of their membership of the LGBTY community. For many of these people, location and the absence of transport, particularly in rural areas, can be aggravating factors to the sense of isolation and lead to mental ill health.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ The needs across the lifecycle must be taken into account by the LGBT Interagency Group;
- ▶ The needs of members of the community living outside the main urban areas must be a particular focus, particularly those areas where rural transport is an issue.

SEXUALITY & 'OUT'

While the majority of respondents to the on-line questionnaire are 'out' to everyone, a significant number of others are 'out' to a restricted group of people only. This suggests an absence of support for those who wish to come 'out' and it also suggests that work in relation to the attitudes and discrimination within the community remains a major issue.

³ Visible Lives as quoted in the discussion papers for the Interagency Working Group

It was acknowledged that it is often more difficult for members of the LGBT community in rural areas to be openly 'out'. This is an area that needs specific support and outreach work. Outreach should be jointly done by LGBT specific organisations and group such as Amach! but also by the network of Family Resource Centres and locally based community organisations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ To provide and support a range of peer-led support networks addressing the issues highlighted by this consultation process. These need to be resourced and supported community workers and others specifically employed to work with the community;

CHILDREN & FAMILIES

A significant proportion of respondents to the on-line survey have children and a large proportion either live with their children or have regular contact with them. The discussions at the Focus Groups explored a number of issues in relation to children. First, it is clear that there is an absence of parenting supports for LGBT parents. There are no networks and few opportunities to meet with similar families. Second, the maternity services do not ask a question about sexual orientation at the time of the first ante-natal clinic, making it necessary for LGBT expectant mothers to have to constantly explain the situation. A third issue of concern is in relation to LGBT people who no longer have any contact with their children. This is a very difficult situation for many and can lead to depression and mental ill health.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The maternity services consider asking a filter question on sexual orientation at the first ante-natal visit;
- Networks for LGBT parents be established and supported;
- Support groups for those who have lost contact with their children be supported to establish;
- Support for those who have visitations with their children be provided.

HOMOPHOBIA & REPORTING

While it may be the case that issues such as homophobia and homophobic bullying have improved, unacceptable levels of homophobic bullying remain. These incidents are of varying severity and frequency. Safety is a constant concern and an awareness of the potential for danger was a feature of the discussions in all the Focus Groups. Members of the LGBT community of all ages are constantly conscious that their sexual identity may place them in dangerous situations. This was particularly striking in relation to younger members of the community, for whom the need to be able to express pride in their identity without attracting danger is essential.

While many feel that when incidents occur they can safely report it to the Gardaí, significant numbers still do not report incidents. Reasons vary for this from not believing that it is severe enough, fears of aggravating the situation or not believing or trusting that the Gardaí will treat it seriously or appropriately. What is clear is that the level of discrimination and homophobic motivating incidents is consistently unreported and therefore unrecorded and ultimately underestimated. In the long term, this is not in the best interests of the LGBT community.

The level of homophobia experienced in schools still appears to be at unacceptably high levels. The discussions at the Focus Groups and the comments made as part of the on-line survey indicate that many schools are failing in their duty to protect their LGBT students. The experience is leading to increased stress and may lead to the increased incidents of self-harm as identified by other research⁴.

⁴ Supporting LGBT Lives 2009

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ A proactive campaign to encourage members of the LGBT community to report all homophobic incidents;
- ▶ The upcoming launch of a national recording mechanism be supported to give members of the LGBT community in Galway the opportunity to have their experiences documented;
- ▶ A campaign to encourage all schools in Galway City and County to explore using the Stand Up campaign and other resources to identify and address homophobia and homophobic bullying, and to increase sanctions against those found to perpetrate this form of bullying.

ISSUES

As a consultation exercise, the focus of this project was in asking participants to identify the issues currently being faced by the LGBT community and to suggest ways in which these might be addressed. The range of issues identified was wide and varied. However, a number of key themes can be identified:

- Isolation, loneliness, depression, mental ill health;
- Lack of information particular to the needs of the LGBT community, such as on health, parenting etc.;
- Lack of opportunities to network and congregate outside of the pub and club scene;
- Lack of visibility and visible role models.

These issues can be compounded by issues such as rural isolation and age. They are often aggravated when LGBT issues intersect with racial, ethnic and other forms of discrimination. The needs and issues particular to the transgender community also need to be addressed.

Health issues particular to the LGBT community were a recurring discussion point throughout the consultation. There appears to be a dearth of information available to the LGBT community on health issues affecting them and the types of screening and other processes that they should engage with. Lack of information generally on all issues particular to the LGBT community was a central theme of the consultation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ LGBT issues need to be addressed by an LGBT specific range of services and supports. Amach!, as a community based organisation with a developed governance infrastructure, is ideally situated to take the lead in the provision of this range of supports and services. However, resources will be required for Amach! to reach this potential.
- ▶ Issues affecting the LGBT community also need to form part of the activities of other community organisations and resource centres in Galway city and county. This work could be supported by the LGBT specific resource, in much the same way as issue-specific resource centres currently support the work of community-based organisations.

RESOURCE SPACE

Galway is unusual in the fact that it does not have an LGBT specific resource or drop-in centre and, as this research indicates, there is a need and demand for such a resource centre. While some may argue that services could be integrated into other services and resource centres, it is clear that safety and a safe space to identify with the LGBT community remain necessities in a society that is still characterised by unacceptable levels of homophobia.

The range and level of need is sufficient to require a systematic and multi-agency approach to the provision of services and supports. The provision of an LGBT Resource Space must be central to a strategy to address the needs identified. This, however, should not be seen as an end in itself but rather as a base from which a comprehensive range of supports and

services can be provided. The LGBT Resource Space would also allow for the community to legitimately claim a space that is not currently provided. The resource space could act as a focal point to LGBT community activities, actions and projects and serve as a visible sign of the legitimacy of the LGBT community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ To build on the commitment in the Galway City Development Plan to provide for an LGBT Resource Space with a team of community, resource and support workers from which a wide range of supports and services can operate. This is the priority recommendation of this consultation process. It will take significant multi-agency commitment to achieve but it is something that can no longer be delayed.