

Here are a few things you can do to make your Independent Living Center more friendly to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) people.

Become comfortable with the issues. Historically, society has been intolerant of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) people and these negative attitudes may affect how we think about LGBT people. It is important for advocates to understand LGBT people and the issues they face. One can become a compassionate advocate by building relationships with local LGBT activists, attending trainings, visiting educational websites, and reading articles and books or watching movies with positive portrayals of LGBT people.

Do not assume your consumers or employees are heterosexual. Use language that does not implicitly assume an individual's sexual orientation or gender. Using inclusive language that does not assume the gender of the individual or that individual's significant other sends a message that it is safe to talk to you about his or her sexual orientation or gender identity. It is important to use this inclusive language with everyone, not just the people who you think may be LGBT. For example, ask "are you in a relationship?" instead of "do you have a boyfriend?"

Do not assume that LGBT orientation is a problem. An LGBT consumer's problems may not be directly related to his or her sexual orientation or gender identity. LGBT consumers face the same types of problems that non-LGBT consumers face. An LGBT consumer's problems will not inevitably involve sexual orientation or gender identity discrimination. Sometimes it is just a landlord dispute or inaccessible public accommodation.

Be aware of assumptions you may have based on a client's sexual orientation or gender identity. We all make assumptions about others based on our own background and experience. The important thing is to be aware so that you do not unconsciously make decisions based on your assumptions about people who are LGBT rather than on your consumer's unique situation.

Recognize that there some of the values of the disability community conflict with the LGBT community's values, and vice versa. This

means that LGBT individuals with disabilities may face barriers in both communities, so providing a supportive environment for LGBT individuals with disabilities is very important.

Create a written policy forbidding slurs and harassment against employees, volunteers and consumers due to their sexual orientation and document that there will be zero tolerance against infractions. Have employees sign a copy of the policy and keep them in their employee files.

Include sexual orientation and gender identity in your non-discrimination policy. Support out staff members by encouraging them to talk about their partners and family. Make sure your family leave policies and benefits programs are equitable. Encourage LGBT employees to bring their partners and children to events where families are welcome.

Mandate the participation of all employees in a diversity program that includes a training session in the area of sexual orientation. Be sure to give employees written materials regarding diversity to supplement their training.

Encourage the attendance of employees in diversity conferences and workshops that address the subject of gay friendly environments. Post information about these events.

Support the formation of a LGBT employee group within your organization. Respond to any concerns the group brings to management's attention.

Provide at least one bathroom that is gender neutral.

Make your office space friendly to LGBT people. Often, LGBT people will assume that a place is unfriendly to LGBT people until he or she receives a clear indication otherwise. Use visual cues to indicate that your office is a safe and welcoming space for LGBT people. Put up posters or stickers that have positive messages about LGBT people, such as a Rainbow Flag or HRC Sticker. Make sure your resource display includes materials specifically for LGBT people. When

possible, hire openly LGBT people as staff members in your organization.

Have positive images of gays and lesbians displayed on your website and in your publications.

Use the name and pronoun that conforms to the client's gender identity consistently in all your interactions with the client, as well as in all correspondence and consumer documents. It is important to be respectful of your client's gender identity by using the name and pronoun that he or she prefers and by asking co-workers, staff, and volunteers to do so. If you are unsure what name or pronoun to use, ask the individual.

Be prepared to address hostile attitudes and irrelevant arguments or complaints. An LGBT client may face hostility from the social service and legal systems.

Invite an out gay or lesbian person to sit on your board of directors.

Encourage LGBT individuals to apply for positions in your organization by placing job listings in LGBT publications.

Celebrate "Gay Pride Month" in June. Make sure these events planned are placed on the employee calendar and communicated to everyone. March in a gay pride parade or sponsor other established LGBT events in your community.

Establish relationships with organizations and businesses that serve LGBT populations. Advertise your organization in the LGBT media.

Support gay rights. Seek information concerning initiatives from the largest gay rights organizations: the "National Gay and Lesbian Task Force" and the "Human Rights Campaign".

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