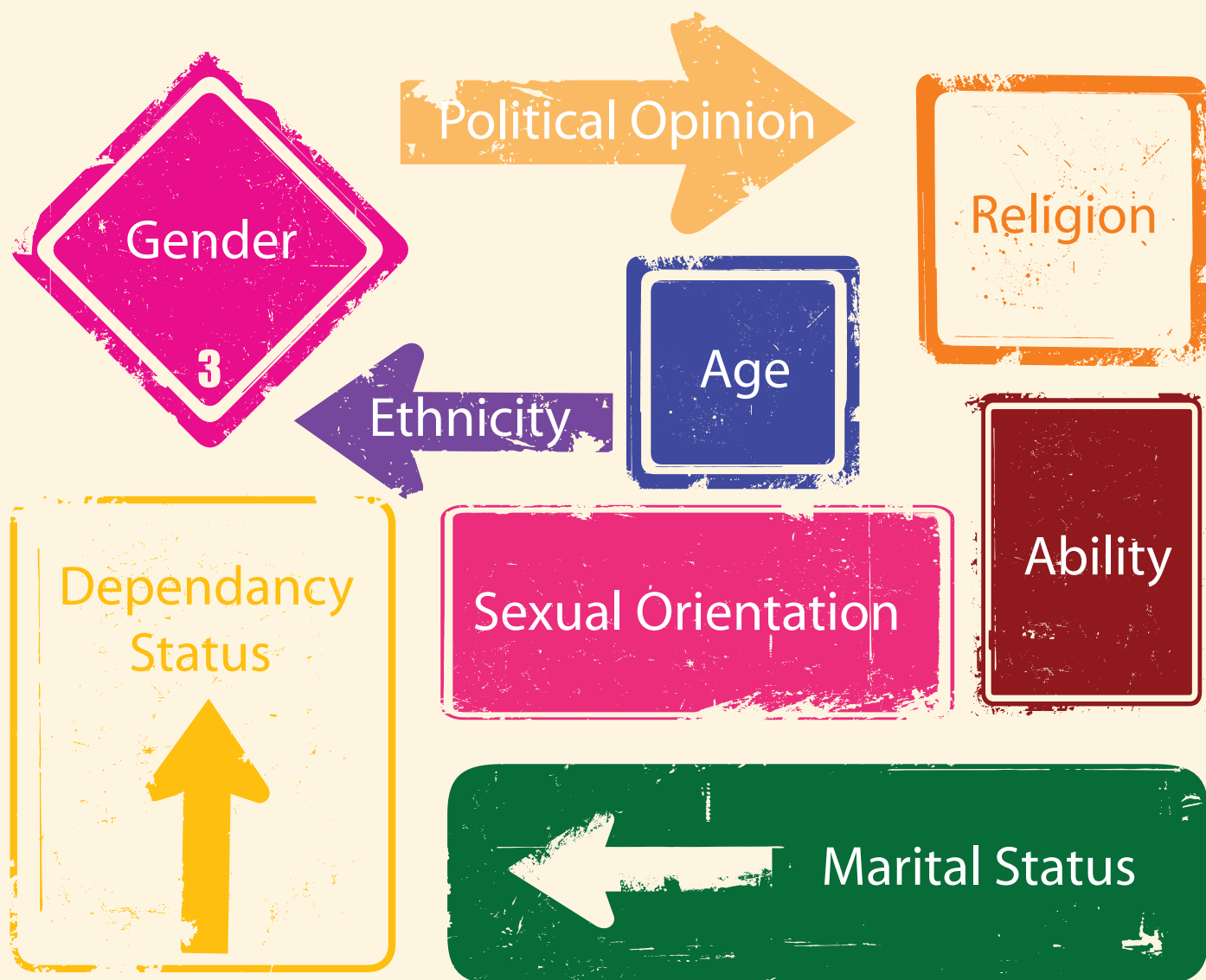


Addressing whole identities or fragmenting lives?



An introductory service provision and employer guide to multiple identities and discrimination in Northern Ireland

Dean Lee & Maria Noble

ADDRESSING WHOLE IDENTITIES OR FRAGMENTING LIVES?

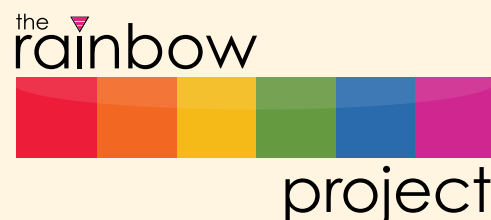
An introductory service provision and employer guide to multiple
identities and discrimination in Northern Ireland

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Contents...

Page	Content
1.	Foreword
2.	What the research says
4.	Key questions
5.	Training scenarios
8.	Key actions
10.	Conclusion
11.	Additional resources



Foreword...

This guide draws attention to those of multiple minority backgrounds in an attempt to improve equality and good relations for all in Northern Ireland. The guide has been put together by two members of the Gay Ethnic Group (GEG), Maria Noble of Unison and Dean Lee of The Rainbow Project drawing on the experiences and views of the GEG members as well as relevant research.

Meeting since 2011, GEG initially was set up as a social support group for individuals from minority ethnic backgrounds who also identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and/or Transgender (LGBT). In May 2012 with the support of The Rainbow Project and Grant Aid from the Good Relations Fund at Belfast City Council, GEG members embarked upon three days of intensive personal development work. This served to expand the group's examination of culture and identity beyond sexual orientation and ethnicity to also consider age, gender, political opinion, religion, physical and learning ability, class, marital status and how these "equality" issues intersect with each other and affect relationships between people and organisations in Northern Ireland.

GEG members noted some very positive experiences as a result of having a diverse, multifaceted identity. However, many of the group experienced discrimination focused on one or more aspects of individual identity. Discussions also highlighted the fact that service providers and employers often deal with only one facet of identity and fail to address crucial others and so provide inadequate, fragmented services. Worse still, some providers and employers have actively discriminated against some facets of GEG members' identity. Such experiences leave individuals feeling never wholly accepted or acceptable in particular contexts and have had a negative impact on members' health and wellbeing. In June 2012 GEG organised and facilitated a training session to highlight these issues amongst equality focused organisations. Feedback from that pilot session has also informed this guide and we hope it enables workplaces across the voluntary, public and private sector to identify some of the issues in working effectively for or with individuals who are or who fear being marginalised or discriminated against.

In summary this short introductory guide, like its subject, is multifaceted and has been produced to support individuals and organisations to;

- a. Increase awareness about the multiplicity of identities in Northern Ireland and the inequalities existing in relation to these different facets of identity.
- b. Welcome, accommodate and make effective provision for individuals with multiple facets of identity both using services and delivering them.
- c. Contribute through their work to building "good relations" among all individuals and communities in Northern Ireland.

Dean Lee and Maria Noble, Gay Ethnic Group.

What the research says...

Below we reference a variety of findings which highlight the issues around discrimination, multiple identity and good relations which we address in this guide.

“There is a widespread assumption that being gay is a phenomenon of white people. Consequently, Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) lesbian, gay and bisexual people (LGB) people’s health needs have been almost completely overlooked in research conducted in the UK”.

Source: NHS Briefing 12 LGB people from BME Communities 2007

“It would be inappropriate to assume that BME LGB communities form a homogenous group; they are socially, culturally, politically religiously and economically diverse. There are also wide ranging differences in perceptions about what it means to be BME and LGB. However, experiences of being BME and LGB mean that one’s health status and access to health services may differ from those of both BME heterosexuals and of white LGB people”.

Source: NHS Briefing 12 LGB people from BME Communities 2007

“Much of the focus when discussing ‘hate crime’ has been on the more widely acknowledged problems of racism, homophobia and sectarianism, and only limited attention has been given to problems of faith, disability and transphobic hate incidents and crime in Northern Ireland”.

Source: Challenge Hate Crime Criminal Justice Responses to Hate Crime in Northern Ireland 2012

“Data collected by the Commission supports the view that there is a need for protection against multiple discrimination... there has been a steady increase in enquiries from complainants to the Commission alleging discrimination on two or more equality grounds over the period between April 2004-March 2009”.

Source: Equality Commission Response to Government Equalities Office’s consultation on multiple discrimination, June 2009

“Behind the legal issues which are discussed below is a simple truth: people do not simply fit into boxes as black, disabled etc. They are diverse, complex, multi-layered, and sometimes they are treated badly for more than one reason. The problem is that our equality laws assume that the treatment of people should be analysed by reference to a single characteristic at a time”.

Source: Multi-dimensional discrimination: Justice for the whole person Equality and Diversity Forum G.Moon 2008

“Overall, racist harassment, particularly in the form of name-calling and so-called “harmless banter”, appears to have become so common that many minority ethnic people appear to have accepted it as a normal part of life here”.

Source: Research review carried out by South Tyrone Empowerment Programme for the Southern Investing for Health Partnership

“Despite extensive legislation outlawing discrimination, there is now a significant body of evidence of discrimination and inequality in Ireland (see Bond, McGinnity and Russell, 2010). Not only does the presence of discrimination seriously undermine equality, it also may have damaging consequences for the individuals involved – in terms of mental and physical health, self-esteem and underperformance of members of the minority group”.

Source: Al Ramiah et al., 2010.

“Discrimination is complex, and people have multiple identities, so it is not always possible to ‘read off’ the reason for discrimination from the respondent’s characteristics. For instance, an older adult with a disability may attribute their failure to get a job, despite being well qualified, to either age or disability grounds, or both.”

Source: Analysing the Experience of Discrimination in Ireland: Evidence from the QNHS Equality Module 2010 Frances McGinnity, Dorothy Watson and Gillian Kingston, Equality Authority and the Economic and Social Research Institute, Dublin 2012

“Minority ethnicity had strong associations with both serious work-related and serious service related discrimination. People of Black ethnicity had 6.6 times the odds of experiencing serious work related discrimination, compared to Whites... Black respondents were four times more likely than White respondents to experience service related discrimination that has a serious impact on their lives.”

Source: Analysing the Experience of Discrimination in Ireland: Evidence from the QNHS Equality Module 2010 Frances McGinnity, Dorothy Watson and Gillian Kingston, Equality Authority and the Economic and Social Research Institute, Dublin 2012

“The rate of reported discrimination of the disabled group has dropped between 2004 and 2010. People with a disability also experienced a drop in discrimination that had a serious impact on their lives. The period after 2004 represented a time of intense policy attention to the situation of people with a disability and it looks as though this focus may have brought about real improvements in people’s lives. Nevertheless, in 2010 those with a disability remained at higher risk of discrimination than those without a disability.”

Source: Analysing the Experience of Discrimination in Ireland: Evidence from the QNHS Equality Module 2010 Frances McGinnity, Dorothy Watson and Gillian Kingston, Equality Authority and the Economic and Social Research Institute, Dublin 2012

“The finding that the most highly discriminated against groups are the least likely to take action indicates the potential benefit of proactive third party interventions such as information campaigns, advocacy and legal supports, and initiatives by employers and service providers to implement good practice”.

Source: Analysing the Experience of Discrimination in Ireland: Evidence from the QNHS Equality Module 2010 Frances McGinnity, Dorothy Watson and Gillian Kingston, Equality Authority and the Economic and Social Research Institute, Dublin 2012



Key questions!

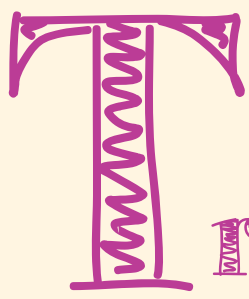
For Individuals:

- We all have multiple facets to our identity, what are yours?
- Are all of these facets of your identity universally embraced by society and how does this make you feel?
- What steps can you take to enhance your understanding and respect for different aspects of your own and others identity?

For Workplaces:

- How well does the thinking, culture and action within your workplace contribute to good service delivery?
- How socially responsible is your organisation? Specifically what positive benefits does your organisation provide and who gets this benefit? Is there scope to increase the benefits you provide and the range of people you provide them to?
- How fully do you monitor and respond to the needs and feedback of your service users, clients, customers, employees and volunteers?
- What opportunities do your service users, clients, customers and employees have to plan and evaluate the service/s you provide, to identify positives, failings and improvements?
- How diverse is your workforce (including volunteers) and how do you measure their levels of satisfaction and contentment?
- What systems do you have in place to address any workplace differences that may arise among your employees and between employees and service users, clients or customers?
- What arrangements do you have in place to use meetings, training and other opportunities as a safe space to address issues of culture, identity, equality and diversity in your organisation?

“Promoting equality and diversity in the workplace is one way businesses can demonstrate their compliance with the law. However promoting greater equality and diversity, especially if it is seen as an intrinsic part of the ethos and culture of the organisation, can lead to improved productivity and growth across the Northern Ireland economy whilst fostering a culture of tolerance and respect”



Training scenarios...



The following examples of workplace or service related discrimination faced by people from multiple minority backgrounds are based on real events experienced by GEG members and are shared here in an attempt to

- Demonstrate subtle and not so subtle discrimination that people with certain facets of identity face.
- Highlight the need for an inclusive and measurable strategy to address the needs of the whole individual and recognise the potential contributions that individuals can offer.

GEG encourages you, as readers, to place yourself in each of these scenarios and to use them as case studies with employees or service users to facilitate open dialogue about equality and diversity issues.

Scenario 1: You are at an equality conference and taking part in a formal group discussion on the use of offensive language and political correctness. A white male in his 40's speaks to say that "homophobia is worse than racism these days." He admits that he would sometimes refer to his younger male line manager as a "black bastard" and claims this is just ironic office banter which his younger colleague seems to take in his stride. His younger colleague even responds jokingly with "get back to work white boy" and the white male insists he takes no offense from that.

- Do you agree, disagree or are you unsure about the white male's perspective and why?
- What issues of power may be at play in this scenario?
- Is there an issue to be resolved in this workplace and if so how might you communicate this to him at the conference?

Scenario 2: You are having a drink in a gay bar with a male Irish traveller friend who also identifies as gay. During a drag performance a drag queen makes numerous references to Gypsies and Tinkers. The whole bar laughs at these jokes but your friend finds them extremely offensive and upsetting. He wants to cut the evening short and go home.

- Why might your friend be especially upset in this setting?
- How would you respond to your friend and to the situation?

Scenario 3: You are a newly employed Administrative Officer in an organisation that supports people with learning disabilities. In the canteen you are invited by two volunteers to sit down beside them. They are talking about an adult male (X) and a female centre service user (Y) who are currently in a relationship together. One of the volunteers says “X doesn’t seem to really like Y that much. Y went to kiss X this morning but he was having none of it.” The second volunteer responds with a smile and says “well maybe X is gay.” The first volunteer says “Euww, don’t say that, that is disgusting. He probably just doesn’t know anything about sex yet the wee dote”.

- The volunteers want to know what you think of the service user’s relationship? How would you respond?
- What attitudes do you feel the volunteers are revealing and how might this affect their relationship with the service users in question?
- Is there an issue to be resolved in this situation? How might you go about it in your position as Administrative Officer?

Scenario 4: You are at a school staff party. In a small group of gay male and straight female and male work colleagues men are using the term ‘bitch’ to insult each other and both men and women are categorising each other jokingly into ‘butch’ or ‘fem’ Lesbian stereotypes. During a smoke break a female colleague confides in you that she is a Lesbian and she finds the references unfunny, sexist and demeaning to women of all sexual identities.

- Do you agree, disagree or are you unsure about her perspective and why?
- How would you respond to her and to the group?
- What can we learn about the use of the term ‘bitch’ and other popular insults such as ‘gay’ which is used by people in Northern Ireland today?

Scenario 5: You are a church leader and recently a gay couple have written a strongly worded letter to you accusing parishoners and clergy of being homophobic after they came out as ‘Gay Christians’ in a local newspaper. They cite examples of church goers refusing to talk to them and being turned down from voluntary positions within the church. When you investigate, the local Church admits to having a problem with the couple’s sexual orientation but add that the couple have always been difficult to communicate with as one displays mental health symptoms and the other is on the autistic spectrum.

- How do you respond to the couple?
- How do you respond to the local church?

Scenario 6: You are a retail manager. One of your staff is gay, from a minority ethnic background and was born with a large birth mark on his right cheek. During a recent supervision the staff member reveals he is frustrated in his work because other staff members tease him about being gay and because some customers recoil when he comes to their assistance but are happy for another staff member to give them assistance. He explains his recent absences from work are due to family matters and he is demotivated since he was overlooked for a recent promotional opportunity.

- How do you support your employee with the matters he raises?

***Notes on using these scenarios**

These scenarios are designed to highlight how problems arise when organisations seek to address inequalities in isolation or even in opposition to each other as if people belonged only to one category. When we do this we deny the reality that an individual's identity is made up of many different facets. Unless we address needs or issues arising out of ALL relevant facets of an individual's identity, the person is rarely understood nor are their needs as a service user met or their potential as an employee wholly realised.

GEG recommends that these scenarios are used only by qualified, experienced Anti-Discrimination or Diversity trainers or facilitators. Discussion and understanding generated from these scenarios can be enhanced with further input and consideration of the following topics:

- Equality and human rights legislation
- Hate crime
- Intersectionality
- Critical literacy
- Anti-oppressive practice
- Literary and social theories of otherness
- Psychological theories of identity formation



Could you write your own scenario based on your own or other's experiences of coming from multiple minority backgrounds? Perhaps you don't identify with a group which has been historically oppressed in Northern Ireland but have an example of how complex or multi-layered your individual identity actually is.

If you think your scenario might enlighten others and are comfortable with it being anonymised and shared then please send it to us (info@rainbow-project.org) for consideration of future work.

Key actions...

As an individual and as an organisation there are many things which you can do to ensure that your workplace can adequately support individuals with multiple identities and backgrounds which are listed below:

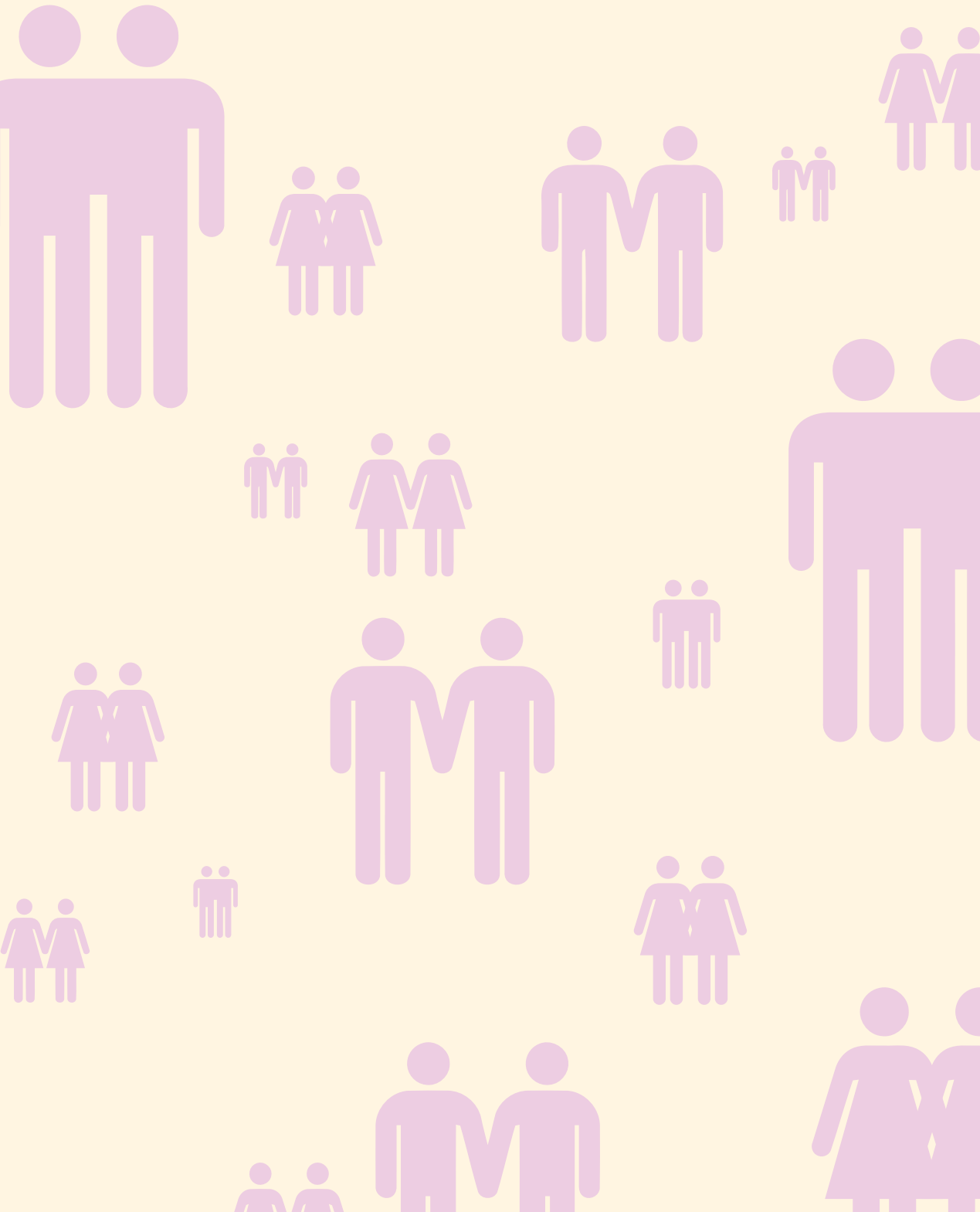
- Make sure your whole organisation is familiar with anti-discrimination, equality and good relations legislation. You can do this by accessing guidance and training from the Equality Commission.
- Prioritise and promote good relations amongst everyone within your organisation and those accessing services provided by your organisation. Define, monitor and continually evaluate how your organisation strives to do this.

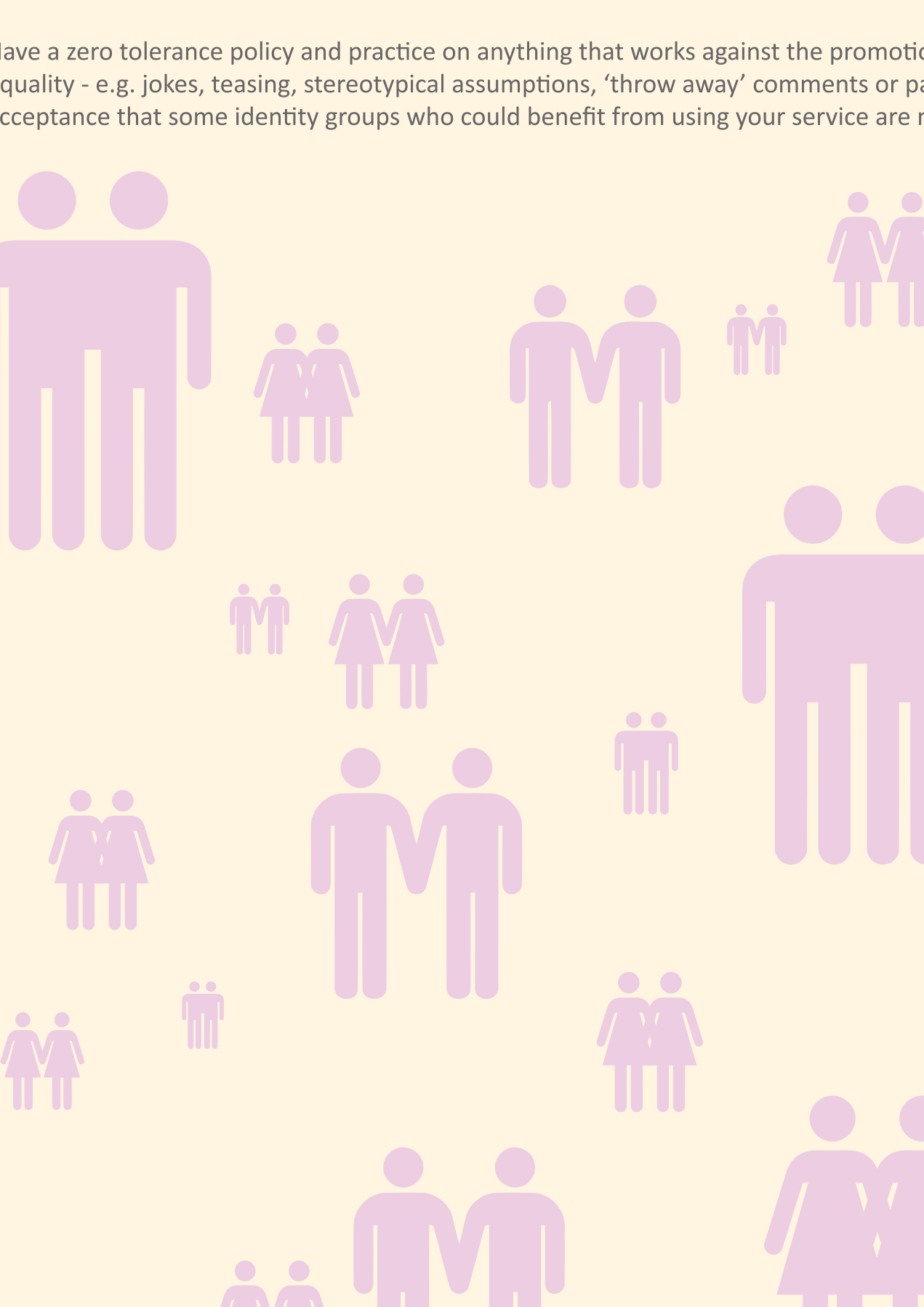
Service Provision / Customer Service

- Recognise that monitoring for equality tends to place people into boxes which split up their identity. Whilst this is necessary to measure how different groups of people are faring it tends to lead to services targeted at specific groups rather than individuals themselves. Be clear that people are multifaceted and your service should strive to have the capacity and flexibility to meet the complex needs of the individual.
- Liaise with a full range of organisations working in good relations and equality to better understand the range of facets of identity that could present in a single service user. Organisations working largely to a single equality issue must also actively engage with other sectors to prevent multiple forms of discrimination from continuing.

Staff and Volunteers

- Be clear that diversity within the workplace can strengthen output and work satisfaction levels among staff and volunteers. Embracing difference takes time, effort, advanced interpersonal skills and understanding of collaborative verses authoritative approaches to power in professional relationships.
- A good place to start is to provide training or a safe space for staff and volunteers to explore the complexities of culture, identity and diversity within the context of their own work environment and services they provide.
- Difficult issues common to all organisations such as personal prejudice or staff and management issues may be better addressed with an external facilitator.

- Have a zero tolerance policy and practice on anything that works against the promotion of equality - e.g. jokes, teasing, stereotypical assumptions, 'throw away' comments or passive acceptance that some identity groups who could benefit from using your service are not welcome.
- 
- A repeating pattern of stylized human figures in purple and pink, representing diverse groups of people, including couples and groups of friends, set against a light yellow background. The figures are simple, rounded shapes with no facial features, emphasizing the diversity of the groups they represent. The pattern is scattered across the entire page, with some larger figures and some smaller ones, creating a sense of a large, inclusive community.



Conclusion...

As stated previously, this Guide not only intends to highlight the struggle to belong by those most marginalised in our society but also draws attention to the multiple facets of identity within everyone in Northern Ireland. The possible existence of a Catholic, Filipino, Lesbian, Green Party voter with a disability or a Male Muslim Migrant working, Alliance voting Bisexual with Aspergers are not unrealistic examples of diversity or “otherness” in Northern Ireland. They are no more multi-faceted than the existence of a male, able bodied, heterosexual Belfast born Presbyterian, Unionist or a Catholic, Nationalist, Mensa member, mother of two from Newry. All exemplify just how complex and multilayered culture and identity is for everyone in Northern Ireland. The difference is that some aspects of our multiple identities are more valued, accepted and provided for in our society than other aspects.

Over several decades anti-discrimination, equality and good relations legislation has gradually sought to redress social inequalities and tackle discrimination on such grounds as gender, political opinion, religion, age, disability and sexual orientation etc. However fifteen years on from the Good Friday Agreement, Northern Ireland news is still dominated with incidents of sectarianism or socio political conflict between Protestants and Catholics, Loyalists or Nationalists and there is still major disagreement on issues of flags, parades and dealing with our past. Although still raging, other social diseases of sexism, racism, ageism, disability discrimination, homophobia, transphobia, poverty and class divisions, continue to receive much less attention and multiple discrimination even less so.

To further redress social inequalities and prevent all forms of discrimination GEG calls for a statutory definition of “good relations” in Northern Ireland at least in line with the Equality Act 2010, s149(5) in England, Scotland and Wales which links “good relations” to the formulation of **tackling prejudice and promoting understanding** among six categories rather than just the three categories mentioned in Northern Ireland’s current Good Relations duty, Section 75 (2).

With or without a more prescriptive and extensive Good Relations legal duty this guide remains an ethical and business reminder of the counter productive nature of all forms of prejudice, discrimination and oppression. Raising awareness of these topics through training and education in schools and workplaces throughout Northern Ireland can help to promote the attitudes and skills needed to build and sustain healthy relationships throughout our society. Self-awareness, cultural sensitivity, respect for difference as well as interpersonal, communication, conflict resolution and solution focused skills are the tools that will take us further away from our troubled, divided past toward a more enlightened, collaborative, productive future not just for both communities but for all individuals and communities in Northern Ireland.

Additional sources...

Below is a non exhaustive list of organisations that can provide further support, advice, guidance and training on various aspects of equality, discrimination and good relations. All of these organisations/contacts have contributed to Gay Ethnic Group activities and the production of this guide.

- **The Rainbow Project**

Belfast LGBT Centre, 1st Floor, Old War Memorial Building, 9-13 Waring Street, BT1 2DX

Email: dean@rainbow-project.org

Contact Number: 028 9031 9030

- **UNISON**

Galway House, 165 York Street, Belfast, BT15 1AL

Email: e.robinson@unison.co.uk

Contact Number: 08000 857 857

Text Telephone: 028 9075 6849

- **The Equality Commission**

7 - 9 Shaftsbury Square, Belfast, BT2 7DP

Email: information@equalityni.org

Contact Number: 028 9050 0600

Text Telephone: 028 9050 0589

- **OFMDFM (Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister)**

GD36, Stormont Castle, Stormont Estate, Belfast, BT4 3TT

Contact Number: 028 9052 8400

- **NICEM (Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities)**

1st Floor, Ascot House, 24-31 Shaftesbury Square, Belfast, BT2 7DB

Email: mark@nicem.org.uk

Contact Number: 028 9023 8645

- **fpa (Family Planning Association)**

3rd Floor, Ascot House, 24-31 Shaftesbury Square, Belfast, BT2 7DB

Email: roisinf@fpa.org.uk

Contact Number: 028 9031 6100

- **Here NI**

Belfast LGBT Centre, 2nd Floor, Old War Memorial Building, 9-13 Waring Street, BT1 2DX

Email: cara.mccann@hereni.org

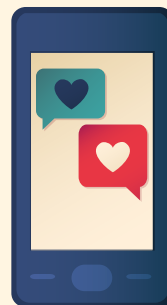
Contact Number: 028 9024 9452

- **Cara-Friend**

Belfast LGBT Centre, 1st Floor, Old War Memorial Building, 9-13 Waring Street, BT1 2DX

Email: steve@cara-friend.org.uk

Contact Number: 028 9089 0202



Promoting the Health and Wellbeing of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and/or Transgender people and their families in Northern Ireland

