

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

LESBIANS

AND GAY MEN

THE REPORT OF A STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT AND CAPACITY-
BUILDING PROJECT WITH THE WATERFORD GAY AND LESBIAN
COMMUNITY.

GAY HIV STRATEGIES

NEXUS RESEARCH

WATERFORD AREA PARTNERSHIP

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FOREWORD BY MINISTER FOR LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

As Minister with responsibility for Local Development, I welcome the opportunity to support the Waterford Area Partnership in their unique work on behalf of the Gay and Lesbian Community.

For too long in Ireland, many people have experienced discrimination and exclusion. It is only through the likes of the initiatives undertaken by the Partnership that we can work together to ensure that everyone has an equal chance of participating fully in Irish society.

I congratulate all who have contributed to this research project and wish you every success as you pursue the recommendations for future action.

Chris Flood, TD,
Minister of State for Local Development and
with special responsibility for the National Drugs Strategy

PREFACE BY WATERFORD AREA PARTNERSHIP

A number of recent research reports have documented the prevalence of discrimination and disadvantage that members of the Gay/Lesbian Community experience in Irish Society.

Although there has been a number of significant policy developments relating to sexual orientation, at a local level the Gay/Lesbian Community have had to operate in a hostile environment. For instance, members of the Gay/Lesbian community in the Waterford area have voiced their frustration in being repeatedly refused use of public venues.

It was in this context, the Waterford Area Partnership prioritised, support and resources to be allocated to the Gay/Lesbian community to enhance its capacity to identify and respond to issues which the community is faced with.

Even facing such barriers, the process to date has been successful in integrating Gay community needs into the programmes of mainstream Statutory/Voluntary services and enhancing the communities ability to meet their own needs.

However, it has been stressed, this is only the initial stages of an ongoing process which will lead hopefully to the needs and issues of the Gay community being built into the programmes of other Statutory agencies such as the S.E.H.B. This report should prove valuable for other Partnerships who are contemplating supporting Gay/Lesbian capacity building. We would like to thank Gay HIV Strategies and Nexus Research for their effective work. We would also like to thank Mr. Chris Flood TD, Minister of State with responsibility for Local Development for his support in launching and writing a foreword for the report.

Ger Doyle
Community Development Co-ordinator
Waterford Area Partnership

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the Waterford Area Partnership for the leadership they have given in commissioning and funding this report and for their commitment to supporting on-going initiatives.

We would also like to thank Chris Flood TD, Minister of State for Local Development for his strong support for this initiative and his interest in following up with the relevant agencies the issues arising in this report.

The project would not have been possible without the commitment of the lesbian and gay community in Waterford, who have to work in sometimes difficult circumstances.

We would further like to acknowledge the support given by many of the agencies interviewed. We hope the initiatives begun in the course of this project will provide a basis for further and more extensive co-operation with the lesbian and gay community in the future.

Kieran Rose, Gay HIV Strategies

Eoin Collins, Nexus Research

1.INTRODUCTION

The following report outlines the results of a project, commissioned and supported by the Waterford Area Partnership, to examine the means by which disadvantage and social exclusion faced by lesbians and gay men can be addressed in the local development process. The Waterford Area Partnership is the first local area partnership to have funded such a project targeting gay and lesbian social exclusion. This form of social exclusion has been identified for some time, especially in the Combat Poverty Agency report *Poverty: Lesbians and Gay Men* (1995), which set out to explore how discrimination, and the fear of discrimination, impacts on the levels of poverty and exclusion amongst lesbians and gay men and to establish the needs of those most at risk of experiencing poverty. The study found that gay people experienced social exclusion in a range of areas directly relevant to the local development programme such as education and training, employment, housing and health.

Another national study, *HIV Prevention Strategies and the Gay Community* (1996), found that while considerable efforts had been made by gay community organisations since the early 1970s to address the needs within the community, they had done so with little or no outside support and often in a hostile environment. The research found that there were few if any linkages between gay community organisations and mainstream statutory or voluntary/community sector programmes or services and recommended partnerships between the gay community and statutory and other agencies in order to address the social exclusion of gay people which inhibits HIV prevention.

Based on the finding of these key research reports, the considerable (as yet unrealised) potential to integrate lesbian and gay issues into local development was examined in a recent article in the Community Workers Co-operative publication *Local Development in Ireland* (Rose, 1998). This initiative of the Waterford Area Partnership is an important first step in realising this potential. The initiative provides very practical lessons on some of the most appropriate and effective approaches to supporting gay community development in the Waterford context that will be of relevance to other areas. It also identifies some programmes developed and delivered through the local development process that are particularly relevant to addressing disadvantage faced by gay people.

1.1Project Aims

The two central aims of the development project were:

- To develop a strategy regarding the most effective ways in which the Waterford Partnership can respond to disadvantage and social exclusion as experienced by gay men and lesbians.
- To build the capacity of the gay community to engage in developmental and partnership work.

1.2National Context

POVERTY: LESBIANS AND GAY MEN

The Combat Poverty Agency report *Poverty: Lesbians and Gay; the Economic and Social Effects of Discrimination* (1995) is one of the most comprehensive research studies yet undertaken to explore

the link between anti-gay discrimination, poverty and the special problems faced by gay people who are already poor. In launching the report, the Chairperson of the Combat Poverty Agency:

“The Study has provided an opportunity to hear the voices and experiences of lesbians and gay men who have been caught up in a circle of discrimination, poverty and social exclusion. It shows that discrimination and prejudice result in lesbians and gay men being disadvantaged and excluded from full participation in society. The study should contribute to putting poverty on the agenda of gay and lesbian organisations and putting gay and lesbian issues on the agenda of groups involved in tackling poverty and in promoting greater social equality and social justice.”¹

The report is striking in its documenting of the harassment and discrimination which many gay people experience:

- Approximately half of respondents became aware of their sexuality before the age of 15 when they were particularly vulnerable and dependent, especially in economic terms.
- Over half of those surveyed experienced problems at school because of their being lesbian or gay and thirteen respondents left school earlier than anticipated as a result.
- More than a third of those who had been on training courses experienced bullying because of being gay.
- Almost half of respondents experienced harassment in the workplace.
- Many respondents job opportunities were severely narrowed because of they avoided work for which they were qualified (21%) or categories of work (39%) through fear of discrimination.
- A quarter of respondents had been punched, beaten, hit or kicked because they were assumed to be gay.
- Half of those who reported such incidents of violence stated that they occurred in their locality.
- Almost one-third of respondents were effectively homeless at some stage of their lives.
- Using the ESRI measure of psychological distress, responses to the survey show that many respondents indicated signs of psychological distress, particularly those in the poverty sub-sample.
- The study also documented more encouraging features, for example, almost all of those respondents who had come out to family members reported that it had improved their lives considerably or in some ways.

The survey results clearly show that there are significant cumulative and interlocking processes of discrimination operating in key economic and social areas which increase the risk of poverty for lesbians and gay men and further disadvantage those living in poverty. The study also showed how gay people avoid, cope with or resist discrimination. The report made 45 recommendations for a range of areas including family and youth, education and training, employment and unemployment, services, health, harassment and violence and emigration. A key recommendation is that a Task Force composed representatives of

¹ Anna Lee, Chairperson of the Combat Poverty Agency speaking at launch of Poverty: Lesbians and Gay Men

government departments, the gay community and others would be set up to initiate action on the disadvantage identified in the report².

ACCESSIBLE AND APPROPRIATE SERVICES

"Research indicates that many gay men are reluctant to disclose their sexual orientation to the GP. Making the practice "gay friendly" with leaflets and posters can facilitate discussion and disclosure". (Irish College of General Practitioners, 1995, *HIV and AIDS in General Practice*.)

A major problem in terms of service provision and take-up identified in the Combat Poverty report and in many other studies, is that lesbians and gay men either will not seek help or will hide their sexual orientation from various service providers because of fear of prejudice and discrimination. The resulting "invisibility" is a major problem in itself. Service providers and community development agencies can be genuinely unaware that they have a gay target group and so no remedial or gay positive action is taken in terms of service provision.

Opening Doors, a study commissioned by Central Toronto Youth Services, makes a series of valuable suggestions to break the negative cycle of invisibility. They describe their recommendations as the four Ps; public profile, policies and procedures, professional development, and programme development. One of the "simplest and most effective ways" of conveying a message of welcome and acceptance to gay youth is through the public profile the agency presents including agency brochures, gay positive posters and literature and outreach work (Simpson, 1994:33). For example, agency brochures could state that lesbians and gay men will be welcomed (not just tolerated). Reception areas could contain gay positive posters or leaflets. Any negative reactions from staff or other clients could be used as an opportunity for raising awareness. Finally, agencies could engage in outreach work into the gay community.

GAY COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

"The first most obvious point to emphasise is that we are talking about a community – one that has organised its own resources to meet the most immediate and pressing needs imaginable in what is often a hostile environment devoid of effective external support" (GLEN/Nexus, 1996:67)

Organised gay/lesbian community development activity in Ireland dates from 1974 when the Irish Gay Rights Movement was founded³. The struggle since then has been to survive and develop in a hostile environment, to provide basic community and social facilities, to help isolated people coming out, to campaign for (almost twenty years) for law reform, to combat anti-gay violence, and to respond to the HIV/AIDS crisis.

While considerable progress has been made, there are still however great barriers of prejudice and discrimination, which continue to undermine the development of the lesbian and gay communities in Ireland today. Even in 1999, to 'come out' is to risk rejection or hostility from family, friends, community, work colleagues or employers. This severely limits the numbers who can get involved in community development. Even with the introduction of the Employment Equality Act (1998) it can still be said that some gay people could be putting their job in jeopardy if they were to openly represent their community at a local partnership level. Equally, an unemployed person or someone on a low wage will have little economic independence and may not have the resources to be able to cope with or

2. Research modelled on this study is now being carried out by Foyle Friend (Derry) and Glasgow City Council.

3. See for example, Rose (1994), GLEN/Nexus (1996) and O'Carroll and Collins, (1995).

avoid or resist harassment arising from their coming out. For many, as the Combat Poverty study showed, emigration or migration is the only option which in turn results in a negative cycle of underdevelopment of the gay community.

The other serious barrier to gay community development was criminalisation which was often used as a reason for not funding gay projects, for not allowing gay switchboards to advertise their services or for refusing recognition to gay organisations (for example gay youth groups). The lack of funding until recently has meant that gay community development has had to rely solely on volunteers who cannot take part in daytime activities which is a fundamental and self-reinforcing blockage in terms of participating in mainstream development activities (or even making applications for funding).

Another aspect of discrimination is that landlords are often unwilling to rent premises or will only do so on the proviso that the address is not publicised. However, in some cases the gay group itself is reluctant to publicise its address for fear of harassment and violence. Hoteliers and others are often unwilling to hire out rooms for socials, fund-raisers or even meetings which makes any form of community development almost impossible. Not surprisingly, the GLEN/Nexus study, *HIV Prevention Strategies and the Gay Community* found that a "combination of negative public attitudes and scarcity of funding has meant that most activities and services are housed in inadequate (and often dangerous) conditions" (1996:68). These realities can result in a sense of hopelessness and disempowerment amongst gay people, as the Green Paper on the community sector put it; "The result for the marginalised is passivity, apathy, indifference and demoralisation" (Government of Ireland, 1997:22). According to the Community Workers Co-operative (CWC), this demobilisation requires that "particular attention" be paid to facilitating the participation of gay and lesbian communities and other communities of interest. Capacity building is "essential" and this involves the provision of resources and ongoing development and training supports to local communities (CWC, 1997:7).

However, despite all these problems, there is a sound tradition of gay community development, for example Gay Switchboard Dublin has provided a continuous service since 1974 without any public funding (until last year). More recently there have been significant new initiatives such as The Other Place and Outhouse, community centres in Cork and Dublin respectively; Foyle Friend (Derry) and Lesbians Organising Together (Dublin). There are also two very successful community businesses, *Gay Community News (GCN)* and The Other Place Cork, which provide invaluable community services, and train, employ and empower significant numbers of gay people.

POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

The policy context for gay and lesbian initiatives has improved significantly in recent years. The Combat Poverty Agency report and recommendations are beginning to have an impact. Sexual orientation is explicitly included in the Employment Equality Act (1998) and in the forthcoming Equal Status legislation, which addresses discrimination in the context of service provision. The Treaty of Amsterdam also contains a new anti-discrimination clause which explicitly includes sexual orientation (it is notable that the Irish government was largely responsible for ensuring that this anti-discrimination clause was included and that sexual orientation was not overlooked).

The National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) report *Sharing in Progress* (Government of Ireland, 1997: 71-72), which dealt with issues of discrimination and inequality, recorded that evidence has been documented on discrimination leading to poverty for a number of groups and referred to Travellers (*Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community*) and lesbians and gay men (Combat Poverty Agency, 1995). It also referred to the "ongoing debate on the extent to which discrimination can increase the risk of poverty for some groups in society". It stated that:

"While homosexuality in itself does not necessarily place one at risk of poverty, the impact, experience and perception of discrimination may limit the full participation of gay men and lesbians in society, and may in some cases place them at risk of poverty"

Reflecting this concern, the Poverty/Equality Proofing Guidelines of NAPS published in 1998 explicitly included sexual orientation.

The National Economic and Social Council (NESF) report, *Equality Proofing Issues* (1996) also specifically included gay men and lesbians although admitting that its particular focus was on women, people with disabilities and Travellers. The report stated that the approach of the *Policy Appraisal and Fair Treatment* (PAFT) procedure, which has been in operation in Northern Ireland since 1994 and which includes sexual orientation, could be a model in the south. The report recommended that equality objectives should focus on, *inter alia*,

Respecting diversity rather than promoting homogeneity, and facilitating the creation of new relations between different communities (NESF, 1996:37)

The report also recommended that equality proofing procedures should apply to the voluntary and community sectors. More recently, in its report *Partnership 2000: Developing the Equality Provisions*, the NESF recommended the establishment of a task force on discrimination against gay men and lesbians (NESF, 1998).

The Department of Social Welfare Green Paper on the community and voluntary sector, *Supporting Voluntary Activity*, recognised the role of organisations representing the lesbian and gay communities and, most importantly, it stated that networks concerned with gay and lesbian issues could be eligible for funding under the category of National Anti-Poverty Networks (1997:63). The Department of Health and Children has produced a number of policy documents, which stress issues of equity, strengthening community action, prioritising vulnerable groups, and promoting safer sexual practices. (Department of Health, 1994, 1995 and GLEN/Nexus, 1996). *The Report to Government* (1993) of the Second Commission on the Status of Women discussed the needs of lesbians and made recommendations in a section entitled "Women in situations of disadvantage". Another significant development in public policy is the Ombudsman's guide to standards of best practice for public servants which includes sexual orientation and other categories in an anti-bias clause.

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

The Programme for Integrated Local Development of Designated Disadvantaged and Other Areas (commonly referred to as the 'Local Development Programme') forms one part of the Operational Programme: Local Urban and Rural Development (LURD) which is part funded by European Union Structural Funds.

The overall objective of the 'Local Development Programme', as stated in the Operational Programme documentation, is to "provide support primarily to communities, especially

disadvantaged communities, which make a collective effort to plan and promote the development of their areas and which are capable of a sustained effort to implement a plan". A key objective is to tackle exclusion and marginalisation resulting from long-term unemployment, poor educational attainment, poverty and demographic dependency.

The main delivery mechanisms for the 'Local Development Programme' are 38 Partnership companies established in designated areas of disadvantage. The essential objectives of the Partnerships are spelled out in the National Plan which launched them (Government of Ireland 1993). They are:

- To improve the prospects for long-term unemployed people in terms of obtaining jobs becoming available in the economy and in terms of setting up their own businesses;
- To support positive discrimination in favour of employing long-term unemployed people in local jobs;
- To provide additional supports to enable early school leavers to participate in education;
- To enhance the capacity of local organisations and communities to participate in local development;
- To improve substantially the physical environment of the areas.

The actions available to them include: initial contact, education, training, work experience, strengthening of community leadership, physical development, employment development and enterprise development.

Area Development Management (ADM) Ltd. has direct responsibility for managing the Programme. ADM is an independent intermediary first established by the Irish government and the European Commission to implement the first Global Grant on Local Development. It is a Company limited by guarantee with a Board of 16 directors, originally appointed by the Government, drawn from the social partners, community voluntary sector, area partnership, local authority managers, business interests and the Department.

The functions of ADM are:

- To evaluate local development plans;
- To allocate funding accordingly;
- To monitor expenditure and performance.

ADM also provides supports to the partnerships, including assistance at set-up stage, information and guidance, encouraging and dissemination of good practice, and assistance with improving state service delivery locally. Although independent, it works with the Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation, which is represented on its Board.

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE LESBIAN AND GAY COMMUNITY

"Each partnership/community group should develop an equal opportunities policy, which involves its active commitment to ensure equality, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, disability, socio-economic background, age, religion, national or ethnic origin, marital status and responsibility for dependants." (ADM, 1995:61)

"....those who are most excluded often find it very difficult to access and become involved in community organisations. This means that considerable effort must be made by local partnerships to identify those target groups and work with them in order to build their capacity to take part in what can be a complex and difficult process of local development" (CWC, 1997b)

The Area Development Management (ADM) guidelines, *Integrated Local Development Handbook* (ADM,1995:61-62) contain policy and recommendations on equality, which includes sexual orientation. It states that implementing an equal opportunities policy requires a positive action programme and positive action aims. It recommends targeting of local groups to ensure full participation, in practice this means "a proactive approach, involving outreach work, consultation, capacity building, liaison with established groups and networks". A follow-up publication, *Towards Gender Equality in Integrated Local Development* (ADM, 1996) includes practical advice on how to develop and implement equal opportunity policies including a warning on such policies "being confined to the filing cabinet". The ADM Equality Committee has produced a report in relation to disability and the role of the committee which could now be expanded to include lesbians and gay men.

The local development programmes provide significant opportunities to combat disadvantage amongst lesbians and gay men and to build the capacity of the lesbian and gay communities to contribute more effectively to social and economic development. The ADM report *Reaching Out to the Excluded*, outlines the main development areas engaged in by local Partnership Companies and Community Groups, all of which have direct relevance to the particular forms of social exclusion experienced by gay people as outlined in *Poverty: Lesbians and Gay Men*. Key in this respect are:

- Programmes to support the unemployed including measures to tackle barriers to employment.
- Support for community development. An important element of this support is to enable "previously excluded groups and communities to engage in audits and analyses of their needs and the needs of their communities with a view to developing innovative and appropriate strategic responses" (ADM, 1997:12).
- Education and training, including a particular focus on measures to address early school leaving and under-performance in the education system.
- Measures to improve local amenities including provision of community centres, support for estate management and community tourism and heritage projects.

1.3 Role and Approach of Gay HIV Strategies

The links between health status and disadvantage are well documented, according to NAPS "Poverty has been found to manifest itself in psychological distress, physical ill health and reduced life expectancy" (Government of Ireland,1997:77). In 1994 the Department of Health and Children funded what was effectively a needs/strategy analysis which was published as, *HIV Prevention Strategies and the Gay Community: Phase One Report; A Baseline Study* (GLEN/Nexus, 1996). The study clearly documented that measures to promote the self-esteem of gay men and to promote gay community development are essential to effective HIV prevention work. There is clear evidence that disadvantaged gay men and those disconnected from the gay community find it more difficult to adopt and sustain safer-sex practices. Accordingly, community development programmes, youth services and other projects should focus on providing the support and positive environment for (disadvantaged) gay men to develop a positive sense of their gay sexuality, to be enabled to come out, and become part of the gay community. There are some, especially young, gay men who are particularly at risk including early school leavers, those who are homeless, or who have been victimised and have very poor self-esteem. Very often, the services dealing

with such young people at risk ignore a central problem, which is prejudice, discrimination and harassment because of the persons gay sexuality.

Arising from the recommendations of this report, the Department of Health and Children agreed to provide core funding for a community development and advocacy project to significantly improve HIV prevention work for gay men by facilitating new programmes, resources and linkages. The Project, titled Gay HIV Strategies, was established in 1997. The Project has aimed to develop effective HIV prevention strategies targeting gay men based on a partnership between the gay community, the statutory sector and relevant other sectors such as the community development sector. Considerable progress has been made by Gay HIV Strategies in initiating relevant partnership approaches in this respect⁴. For example:

- A partnership process between the Eastern Health Board and all the major gay community service providers has been put in place arising from a proposal by Gay HIV Strategies. The process is chaired by Pat Mc Loughlin (now Chief Executive) and the goal has been to build the capacity of gay organisations to engage in HIV prevention work and also to contribute to Health Board policies. A range of community HIV prevention pilot projects have been funded by the Health Board. Initiatives funded have included support for the Dublin gay youth group⁵, the publication of the Parents Support Booklet, a self-esteem course, a project to increase the availability of Gay Community News, a Gay Sauna health project, and a range of information material. Gay HIV Strategies has provided on-going professional back-up for the community groups and the process itself. The process is to lay the basis for the development of a HIV prevention plan of action for gay men for the EHB area involving the community and statutory sectors.
- As a result of an initiative by Gay HIV Strategies, the National Social Service Board (NSSB) have funded the development and distribution of a package of information with regard to gay/lesbian issues including health and HIV/AIDS. The information package was prepared by Gay HIV Strategies, Gay Switchboard Dublin and Lesbian Education Awareness and was distributed through the 500 information outlets serviced by the NSSB. The NSSB funding also allowed for the production of posters and postcards which are a resource for agencies/organisations to indicate their service is gay friendly.
- Arising from a submission by Gay HIV Strategies to the National Crime Forum, a consultative process between the gay/lesbian community and the Gardai has been put in place with the objective of developing a programme to combat the considerable levels of prejudiced-based violence or hate crimes against gay people. This violence which is frequently unreported is destructive of individual and community self-esteem and has a significant negative effect on HIV prevention work. The report of the National Crime Forum discussed these issues and commended the consultation process between the Gardai and Gay HIV Strategies.

NATIONAL – LOCAL LINKAGES

There have been a number of very productive national-local linkages developed in the course of the project. Arising from consultations with the National Youth Federation (NYF) and with Waterford Regional Youth Services, the NYF is to organise the first youth services conference on gay and lesbian youth issues.

4 . See Gay HIV Strategies Progress Reports 1997-1999.

The project commissioned by the Waterford Area Partnership is a major initiative in terms of developing linkages between the gay community and Local Area Partnerships in the context of the Local Development Programme. The project has been quoted as a model of good practice in numerous reports, for example to the National AIDS Strategy Committee and submissions by Gay HIV Strategies to, for example:

- The Green Paper on the Community and Voluntary Sector;
- The Combat Poverty Agency Strategic Plan;
- The forthcoming National Development Plan;
- Current Review of the National AIDS Strategy;
- The Draft Second Report by Ireland on the UN Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Also arising from this project, a submission was made to the Minister for Finance to explicitly name lesbians and gay men as a target group in measures to address social exclusion within the National Development Plan. A proposal was also made the Tallaght Partnership to develop a training curriculum on gay and lesbian issues for mediators in the Local Employment Service.

The project at local level was also able to benefit from progress made by Gay HIV Strategies at a national level not least the availability of new and much needed information materials such as the Parents Support booklet and the productive models of good practice provided by, for example, the EHB partnership process.

2.LOCAL CONTEXT

2.1 Profile of the Area

Waterford is the largest city in the South East Region with a population of over 40,000 people. A further 40,000 live within a catchment area of 15 miles, representing 25% of the region's total population.

The South East region includes a number of other urban centres in close proximity and with close links to Waterford. These include Kilkenny, Carlow and Wexford. In addition to the Waterford Area Partnership, the region also has three other local area partnerships: Waterford County Partnership, Wexford Area Partnership and County Wexford Partnership. Most of the statutory agencies represented on these partnerships are organised on a regional basis, including the South East Health Board, FAS and the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs.

Waterford City has two projects funded under the Community Development Programme run by the Department of Social Community and Family Affairs. These are the Ballybeg Community Development Programme and St. Bridgid's Family and Community Centre. Both play a significant role in the development and support of community initiatives to tackle disadvantage in the city.

5 . The report of this pilot project is now available (Gay Switchboard Dublin/Nexus Research, 1998).

2.2 Waterford Area Partnership

The role of Waterford Area Partnership (WAP) can be summarised by its mission statement:

“By working in partnership and through consultation, to make a positive impact on the quality of life of the long-term unemployed, and the socially and economically excluded in Waterford City.

Lesbians and gay men are included in the Partnership’s policy statement on social exclusion.

“Waterford Area Partnership Ltd. has set out to ensure that those that do not presently enjoy the full quality of life that Waterford has to offer, will be encouraged and offered the opportunity to participate and enjoy equality of opportunity-regardless of class, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, age or disability”. (Waterford Area Partnership Annual Report, 1997)

The Partnership has “identified equality as being essential to tackling social exclusion and disadvantage. Equality permeates the development plan and its Positive Action Programme sets out to identify and eliminate discrimination and barriers to development opportunities.” (1997:21)

While an important role of the Partnership is to provide grant aid, its role, according to the its Annual Report, is in no sense limited to this. The Partnership “is in essence both a catalyst and a facilitator in terms of creating the right kind of climate and the right kind of environment for disadvantaged communities to thrive”. (1997: 21)

The planning and operations of the Partnership are overseen by a Board of Directors representative of the statutory sector, the community and voluntary sector and the social partners. There are also four main management committees with responsibility for initiating and implementing actions under four development themes identified in the Partnership’s Development Plan (1996-1999). These, as set out in the annual Report (1997), are as follows:

The **Enterprise Employment and Training Management Committee** has the overall function of creating an enterprise culture in areas and within groups where an enterprise culture did not exist. Specific targets of the programme and committee include:

- The provision of a range of support measures for the creation and development of local enterprise and development;
- Maximising the effectiveness of the support available under existing state services and the Community Support Framework (1994-1999);
- Improving the potential of unemployed people, and especially those who are long-term unemployed and in socially excluded communities, to gain employment in the community generally and specifically in their own areas.

A Services to the Unemployed Sub-Committee also operates under this theme with the specific purpose of providing a programme of advice and support in career planning for those who are long-term unemployed.

Education Management Committee. The education role of the Partnership is to support those who have difficulties entering existing courses and to design and develop training programmes which are linked to job opportunities in the city. The ultimate aim, according to the WAP Annual Report, is to deliver focussed training course for groups

such as people with disabilities, youth, women, Travellers and community groups. in line with this, the specific aims of the Education Management Committee are;

- To create specific training, education, employment and work experience opportunities for those who are long-term unemployed which will promote their integration into the labour market and will concurrently contribute to local and community development;
- To provide additional supports to facilitate participation in and benefit from education including at primary level, for those at risk of early school leaving and under achievement leading to exclusion.

The Education Committee has two sub-committees, one of which focuses on adult education and training, the other on early school leaving.

Infrastructure, **Environment and Community Services Committee**. The programme under the responsibility of this committee is divided into five initiatives. These are;

- *Housing and Accommodation*, which set out to identify needs for housing and the homeless, to provide shelter for the marginalised and to create a Waterford Forum for Housing. Its work affects individuals ranging from those who are sleeping rough to victims of abuse.
- *Recreation and Amenities* which sets out to provide equal access to sport, recreation, arts and drama for target areas and to provide access to facilities for clubs. It aims to benefit specific communities including children of disadvantaged families, Travellers and youth with disabilities.
- *Drug Programme* which aims to increase awareness of drug use in the targeted communities by running programmes within the communities, co-ordinating outreach work and working with schools.
- *Childcare Provision* which aims to provide accessible childcare facilities for target groups and of particular benefit to Travellers, unemployed people, people with disabilities women and families at risk.
- *Community Services*: Aims to provide information to women ranging from those with disabilities, lone parents and Traveller women through research task-forces, Women's Resource Centre and information networks.
- *Women's service*: to develop services for women in their communities.

The **Community Development Management Committee** aims to “enhance the capacity of local communities, particularly in areas of economic marginalisation and de-population, to participate fully in local development and to counter social exclusion”. Building people's capacity, according to the WAP annual report, involves developing and implementing specific developmental programmes for women's groups, lone parents and people with disabilities which will help them to avail of opportunities and make decisions which will enhance their own lives.

With regard to housing, this development area includes The Tenant Participation Programme which supports tenant's associations in their endeavours to participate in the management of their estates and to participate and influence decision-making structures which have an impact on housing issues.

Each of the management committee's includes representatives from relevant statutory, social partner and community sectors. Their work is supported by six full-time staff in the Partnership including the Manager, administrative staff and three co-ordinators responsible for community development, education and enterprise,/employment/training, respectively. The partnership also part fund a Traveller Worker for the city who is helping Travellers to participate in mainstream resources and to improve services which impact on policy for Travellers.

3.ACTIONS UNDERTAKEN

3.1Lesbian and Gay Community

As part of the process of building the capacity of the gay and lesbian community, a series of discussion and planning meetings were organised by Gay HIV Strategies/Nexus Research, for members of the community during the course of the project. The main purpose of these meetings was to provide an opportunity for people to come together to discuss issues and needs, identify possible initiatives in response to these needs and to take action.

Individual consultations were also held with people previously/currently involved in gay community development in order to obtain a deeper understanding of the situation locally and to facilitate an inclusive process.

The key issues emerging from each of these meetings are outlined below. The various outcomes of the process are then outlined in section 4.

BACKGROUND

There is a history of significant gay and lesbian community action in the City. Waterford Assembly, an umbrella group for various community initiatives, was established in the early 1990s. The Assembly was a was an effective and high profile organisation in the City. It organised regular social/cultural events in venues such as the Garter Lane Arts Centre. It facilitated and funded the local telephone helpline for gay people, Gay Line. It was also involved in the setting up of local Parents Support group.

For a variety of most understandable reasons including the lack of effective external support, lack of community infrastructure and training, and volunteer burn out , Waterford Assembly went into decline. At the start of the project, the GayLine was barely able to continue operating because of a lack of funds and new volunteers. There had been no gay community social or other events for some time. There were no commercial spaces such as bars, discos or cafes where gay people were welcome on an ongoing basis.

On a more positive note, the local Parents Support members integrated themselves into the Dublin-based group and remained active. Indeed, one member, a teacher, wrote a valuable article for the INTO magazine. Also, a student gay/lesbian group had been established in the Waterford Institute of Technology.

COMMUNITY MEETINGS

Kick-off Meeting (May 1998)

To begin the capacity building process, an initial meeting was held with members of the gay and lesbian community in Garter Lane Gallery. The meeting, which was jointly organised and facilitated by GayLine and Gay HIV Strategies/Nexus Research, provided an opportunity for participants to discuss the needs of gay people in Waterford and to consider what was needed in order for these needs to be met.

With regard to needs, the most frequently referred to issue was the absence of safe and accessible pubs or other social venues in the city for gay men and lesbians to meet and socialise on an on-going basis. The absence of such facilities had a number of serious effects, in particular:

- It led to considerable isolation, particularly for lesbians and gay men who, through lack of money or other constraints, were unable to travel to the main gay venues in Dublin or Cork.
- It acted as a significant barrier to community organisation and development. In this regard, participants noted the existence of lesbian and gay community centres in Cork and Dublin, which provided space for people to meet and organise activities and services to meet various needs in the community such as the needs of youth, older gay people and so on.
- It provided no avenue or opportunity for the distribution of gay specific HIV prevention information and material. (One of the later actions organised locally was a programme of events for World AIDS Day).

Other issues raised at the meeting included:

- The need for renewed support for GayLine, the gay switchboard, which played a vital role in providing support and information for gay people in the area. Key in this respect were the need for new volunteers, training, and funding to carry on the service.
- The particular isolation faced by young gay people who do not have the means to meet others and do not have access to positive messages regarding their sexuality. According to a number of participants, this isolation can put great strain on young people, causing them to miss or under-perform at school or college. Lack of awareness of HIV/AIDS among young gay men in Waterford and the absence of any appropriate information to address this was also singled out as a particular cause for concern.
- Harassment and violence. According to participants at the meeting, coming out as gay in Waterford has had a very negative impact on the lives of some people. One person described being harassed on an on-going basis at his workplace in a local factory. Another person talked of being attacked in the area in which he lived because people had assumed he was gay.
- Gay people on low incomes tended to be particularly disadvantaged by the absence of local lesbian and gay facilities as they did not have the resources to travel outside the area to meet other gay people. Low income, poor education or lack of job skills also restricted peoples choices in terms of where they could live or work, which had very

negative implications for those who experienced harassment in these areas of their lives.

- Gay people are sometimes reluctant to seek help or will not disclose their sexual orientation to various service providers because of fear of prejudice and discrimination.

Following the initial identification of needs and difficulties faced by gay men and lesbians, the organisers then tried to move the discussion on to consider what could be done to help rejuvenate the gay community in the area and to start addressing the problems identified. However, moving the discussion forward along these lines proved difficult for a number of reasons. In particular:

- For some people, the meeting provided one of the first opportunities they had had to share their concerns and experiences and to get to know other gay people in the area. It was important not to alienate these people from the process by moving on too quickly to considerations of actions and future organisational strategies.
- The collapse of Waterford Assembly would appear to have damaged people's confidence in the capacity of the gay and lesbian community to successfully organise and develop. As a result, discussion on actions tended to be dominated by people's concerns and experiences of what had gone wrong in the past which in turn led to low expectations as to what could be accomplished in the future.

In the light of these difficulties, it was agreed that more pre-development work in the form of community meetings and individual consultations was necessary to get to a point where actions could be agreed and implemented. To continue this process, a second community meeting was then arranged which it was agreed would continue the discussion already undertaken on the needs of the community but would also provide for more structured discussion on possible actions.

Second Meeting of Waterford Lesbian and Gay Community (5th June 1998)

The second meeting of members of the gay and lesbian community was again held in the Garter Lane Gallery. The meeting, which was chaired by a professional facilitator, began with a review by the project organisers of the main issues identified at the first meeting including the need for places to socialise on a regular basis, the provision of information and support for people to 'come out' and actions to address discrimination and prejudice. This review was then followed by a presentation from a representative of the 'Other Place', the Cork Lesbian and Gay Centre, who outlined the developments that had taken place in Cork over the years and some of the lessons that had been learned.

Following the presentations, participants split up into small groups. In response to one of the main gaps identified in the area, i.e. the absence of facilities for meeting and socialising, each group was asked to 'brainstorm' on what type of social facilities or activities they would like to see developed or held in Waterford and then to consider what could be done to put them in place.

In response to the first question in relation to needs, the groups reported the following ideas when the main meeting was reconvened:

- Gay identified pub and café;
- Showing of films and staging of theatre with a gay interest;

- Holding and facilitating regular meetings for people 'coming out' like those undertaken by the Icebreakers Group in Dublin;
- The establishment of lesbian and gay groups around common interests, such as hill walking groups etc.
- The establishment of support groups for people with special or particular needs and circumstances such as young people, unemployed, those who had experienced harassment and violence etc.
- Holding of events which had worked well in the past such as boat trips down the Suir, table quizzes and tea dances.

Participants were more reluctant to answer the question as to what could be done, or who would be involved, in making the various ideas suggested a reality. Part of this reluctance was linked to the disbandment of the Waterford Assembly and the difficulties in organising events or services in the past. A number of important issues were raised in this respect, in particular:

- It was very difficult to obtain venues/premises for gay and lesbian events because of anti gay prejudice and discrimination. The venues that were obtained were often inaccessible or unsuitable (for reasons such as personal safety etc.), which negatively impacted on turnout.
- Problems in obtaining venues were exacerbated by communication problems - organisers having to strike a difficult balance between notifying gay people of up-coming events while at the same time trying to ensure that the events did not have such a high profile that they would cause some people to feel exposed or vulnerable if they attended. This was considered particularly problematic for people who would experience harassment or discrimination, for example in their workplace or the area in which they live, if it was known they were gay.
- Active involvement in organising events requires a person to "come out" to some extent and have a certain level of empowerment as a gay person. It was stressed at the work shop that there are considerable costs in "coming out" which invariably limits the numbers of people who can actively involve themselves in gay community organising and development. There was a feeling that "once a person volunteered to do one thing they were then loaded with responsibility for doing everything". This led to considerable 'burnout' on the part of the individuals concerned.
- In trying to respond to a variety of needs with few resources and little outside support, gay community services were inevitably limited. Frustration at lack of services and facilities could sometimes be directed at gay volunteers. As a result, people were sometimes reluctant to renew their involvement in the organisation of gay activities. This also acted as a constraint in getting other people involved.
- The only gay service to have survived was the gay information telephone service GayLine. However the lack of other gay or 'gay friendly' facilities and services made it difficult to maintain even this service. According to one person who had been involved in GayLine, it was "dispiriting sitting in a room on your own with nothing to offer callers".

A number of participants at the meeting (including the representative from the Cork lesbian and gay centre and Waterford Regional Youth Services) then suggested that people should begin to consider the Waterford Assembly as having being a success rather a failure. Not only had the Assembly been instrumental in organising activities, but the lessons learned, especially in relation to the negative aspects that ultimately resulted in its collapse, provided important pointers as to what was necessary to support gay community organisations on a more sustainable basis. The challenge therefore, was to ensure that the necessary and appropriate support could be made available to the gay community in order to overcome the difficulties identified, whether through the development project being supported by the Waterford Partnership or through other channels.

As the meeting came to a close, there was considerable agreement that while further general discussion was important, the next community meeting should move on to focus more clearly on planning for some of the specific proposals raised by the different discussion groups at the meeting. To provide for this, the representative from Waterford Regional Youth Services, who is also a director of the Waterford Partnership, suggested that the Partnership offices would provide a useful meeting place for such a planning session. It was then agreed to hold this meeting in these offices at the end of June.

Third Gay and Lesbian Community Meeting (28th June 1998)

The third gay and lesbian community meeting was held in the Waterford Partnership offices in the latter part of June and jointly facilitated by the Director of Gay HIV Strategies and a member of GayLine. Attendance was down from the previous meetings, nine people in all being present. This, it was suggested by a number of people, may have been linked to the fact that the meeting had been billed as having a specific focus on the planning of community development activities and events.

As a way of overcoming the barriers to gay community development in Waterford identified at the previous meeting and to respond in an immediate way to the needs expressed, it was agreed to hold a number of easily organised events with the support of Gay HIV Strategies/Nexus Research and Waterford Regional Youth Services. It was suggested that people be invited to get involved in a 'working group' to organise these events and proposed that their involvement could be limited to these initial actions. It was felt that this approach was much more appropriate to the situation than a committee which would have a wider and longer or unlimited remit.

Accepting this approach, a 'working group' was then formed from members of the gay and lesbian community present at the meeting to organise the following activities:

- A bus trip and overnight stay to the 'Other Place', the gay centre in Cork City. To support this, Gay HIV Strategies agreed to get in touch with the centre in Cork to help organise the event at their end.
- A boat trip on the River Suir for gay men and lesbians. An event such as this had been held in the past and had proved very successful.

In addition to these events the Director of Waterford Regional Youth Services volunteered to hold a weekend in the country for gay youth. Members of the newly formed working group agreed that this would be of great value and volunteered to help organise the event. Informing gay youth was identified as a particular problem and it was agreed that the Director of Waterford Regional Youth Services and various gay people present would work closely together to inform and encourage young people to attend.

The needs of the GayLine, the gay switchboard service, were also raised at the meeting, in particular, the urgent need for more volunteers and for training. It was agreed that Gay HIV Strategies would continue to liaise with members of the service and help organise any assistance they required to help maintain and renew the service.

At the close of the meeting, there was a general feeling that considerable progress had been made in moving the process forward. A 'working group' had been formed and as one person put it "things now seemed to be happening at last". There was also general agreement that more community meetings were necessary to support and monitor progress. A further meeting was then organised for mid-July in the Partnership offices which people felt had provided a very positive environment.

Fourth Gay and Lesbian Community Meeting (July 1998)

The fourth community meeting was again facilitated by Gay HIV Strategies. A number of new people were also in attendance, including a representative from Lesbian Education and Awareness (LEA), a lesbian community development project based in Dublin and funded under the NOW Programme.

Progress had been made in organising the events agreed at the previous meeting. In particular:

- The Cork trip had been arranged between the various members of the 'working group' and the gay centre in Cork, including the booking of transport and accommodation. Posters had been prepared and were to be put up over the coming days.
- The Director of Waterford Regional Youth Services reported that he had booked a venue for a weekend residential for gay youth on the 4th to 5th of September. There was a need to communicate the event to young people and posters and other methods were discussed.

Communicating easily and quickly with gay and lesbian in the area was a major problem. Two people at the meeting said they would be interested in compiling a newsletter to publicise the community meetings and the events organised. They also volunteered to investigate means of distributing the newsletter, including Internet, Gay Community News and other outlets in Waterford. The representative from LEA offered her assistance in supporting this work.

A number of people present said they had begun to meet (very informally) each Saturday in a coffee shop in the city centre. These meetings they felt, provided an opportunity for people to get to know one another as well as an opportunity to meet and plan various events, including those agreed at the community meetings. It was suggested that these meetings be publicised.

The community meeting then moved on to a discussion of on how the GayLine service could be maintained and enhanced. Suggestions included the need for an answering machine or technical facilities to divert calls to Gay Switchboard Dublin when volunteers were not available to take calls. The need for publicising the service was also raised. It was pointed out by the representative from GayLine however, that the key requirement was for more volunteers.

While there were a few who attended most meetings, there was also a high turnover of people attending which was a significant problem in terms of developing a cohesive and efficient working group.

Other Meetings

Three subsequent community meetings were facilitated in the course of the project to organise social events and discuss various community development and organising issues. These meetings

were also held in the Partnership Offices. Ongoing liaison was also maintained by telephone and e-mail.

Arising from a submission made by Gay HIV Strategies, members of the local gay community participated in a regional seminar organised by the Department of Social Community and Family Affairs on the Green Paper on the Community/Voluntary sector.

INDIVIDUAL CONSULTATIONS

As well as providing useful pointers on how to initiate an inclusive community consultation process, consultations with individuals currently or previously active in gay community development was important in gaining an understanding of the local situation. People consulted included the two members of Parents Support, a support group for parents of lesbians and gay men. Parent support groups have proved very effective in helping parents come to terms with the fact that their children are lesbian or gay. Both members of the Waterford group identified fear as being a significant constraint in efforts to develop accessible gay community services. This fear extends to parents, who are often 'terrified' of the implications of their child being gay including the fact becoming known in their local community. This can lead to isolation and a reluctance to seek help locally, even from Parents Support.

One resource that had proved valuable for the parents group in Waterford were the connections made with Parents Support in Dublin and Gay Switchboard Dublin. The booklet produced by Parents Support in Dublin (funded by the Eastern Health Board) entitled *If Your Child is Gay or Lesbian* and information leaflets based on the book had been particularly valuable. People were also able to get contact information from Gay Switchboard Dublin on the Waterford parents group. However, lack of additional resources, particularly local volunteers, restricted the extent of support the group could offer.

Other issues raised by the Parents Support members and other individuals consulted, some of which reflect the concerns and needs expressed at the gay community meetings, included:

- The need for safe meeting places for gay people in the city such as pubs, clubs and a community centre which could become the focus for community activity and communication.
- The value of having an 'education team', involving gay people and their parents, which would be available to go into schools. This team, if it had access to schools, could play an important role in addressing bullying and isolation of gay youth.
- The need for proper support for gay community development. According to people interviewed, the organisers of Waterford Assembly (one person in particular) had 'taken an awful lot on their shoulders'. Without support, the personal pressures involved were probably the main factor in the collapse of the group.
- The need for qualified counsellors to deal with gay issues. Poorly qualified counsellors it was maintained, had in some instances exacerbated the problems for gay people and/or their parents in coming out.
- The need for general publicity to address anti-gay prejudice and discrimination in the Waterford area.

3.2 Statutory and Voluntary Services

In order to identify practical ways in which mainstream agencies could improve their service response and build linkages with the gay community, the project organisers held a series of consultation meetings with key personnel in statutory and voluntary services in the Waterford area.

AGENCIES/PERSONNEL CONSULTED

The following Waterford Area Partnership personnel were consulted:

- Joe Stokes, Manager;
- Ger Doyle, Community Development Co-ordinator;
- Ann Marie Irish, Education Co-ordinator, Waterford Area Partnership;
- Charlie Spillane, Enterprise, Employment and Training Co-ordinator;

The following were consulted in relation to their roles their respective Agencies and on the relevant committees of the Waterford Partnership:

- Michael Dee, FAS and Co-ordinator of the Enterprise, Employment and Training Committee;
- Mary Goode, Probation and Welfare Service and Co-ordinator of Education Management Committee;
- Dermot Halpin, South Eastern Health Board and Co-ordinator of the Infrastructure, Environment and Community Services Management Committee;
- Una Ryan, Ballybeg Community Development Project and Co-ordinator of the Community Development Committee.

Other consultations included:

- Eoin O'Neill, Director, Waterford Regional Youth Services and member of the Board of the Waterford Area Partnership;
- Gerry Maher (Regional Manager) and Mick Cummins, Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs;
- Biddy O'Neill and Ann McLoughlin, Health Promotion, South Eastern Health Board;
- Brid Dowling and Marion Smiles, Ballybeg Community Development Project;
- Joe Phelan and Leo Timson, FAS Training Centre;
- Dr. T. Wilson and Helen Barry, STI Clinic, Regional Hospital;
- Derek Verso, Arts Officer, Waterford Corporation;
- Garda Juvenile Liaison Officer;
- Noel Walsh, Centre for the Unemployed;
- Ann Jordan and Catherine O'Neill, Guidance Counselling, Waterford Institute of Technology;
- Carmel Terry, St. Brigid's Family and Community Centre;
- Brian O'Shea, TD, previously Minister for Health Promotion.⁶

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION

The purpose of these consultations was to jointly identify practical ways in which the agency/programme could respond to the needs of gay people, build links with gay community service providers and resource the development of the gay community.

6 . There are a range of other agencies that have a crucial effect on the well-being of gay people that owing to time constraints could not be covered in this phase of the development process. These include areas such as general educational services, housing and homelessness, migration/emigration, library services, GP services and mental health.

The approach taken in the consultations usually involved a discussion of the situation of gay people in Waterford and the Agency's understanding of and current response to the needs identified. Opportunities and barriers in relation to improved service responses and a range of possible initiatives were then discussed.

The consultation process showed that, in common with the situation nationally, there is very limited provision from the statutory or mainstream voluntary/community sector to address the particular needs of gay people. For example, no agency had taken a proactive and concerted approach to combating the effects of anti-gay prejudice and discrimination in their service area.

Agencies differed greatly in their awareness and understanding of the issues affecting their gay clients and in their openness to considering new service responses. In some cases the agency worker had an understanding of the issues affecting their gay clients and the discussion focused on how to improve the service response. For example, Waterford Regional Youth Services in its report *Seen and Heard: A Report into the Needs of Young People in Waterford* identified the particular needs of gay youth. In a section dealing with "more excluded youth" it states that young people who are gay or lesbian "can become the subject of harassment or abuse" and have "very specific developmental needs" (Waterford Regional Youth Services, 1996: 43). The report referred to the need for "education around sexual orientation" and called for innovative responses to be designed and delivered in consultation with "various interest groups in the voluntary sector who have firsthand experience of specific issues" (Waterford Regional Youth Services, 1996: 45).

In a small number of cases the agency worker took on responsibility for developing services responses for the gay community. Close liaison with the latter personnel throughout the course of the project was particularly useful during the development process in dealing with issues that arose, availing of opportunities and in identifying possible ways forward. Other positive responses included agreeing to put up gay community information material such as posters and leaflets as a way of making the profile of the organisation "gay friendly". A number of pilot project/funding proposals were prepared as a result of these consultations.

In the case of other agencies, while there was some general awareness of anti-gay prejudice, it was surprising that there was little understanding of how this created problems for their gay clients in effectively accessing the relevant service. In a few cases, agency personnel were initially reluctant to meet the project organisers, explaining that they did not see how issues affecting gay people were relevant to their service. In these latter cases, the consultations focused on a discussion of how anti-gay discrimination might affect their service and their gay clients.⁷

Interestingly, the consultation with service providers did reveal similar issues to those raised by the gay community. Perhaps most significantly, a number of agency personnel stressed that the strength and resilience of anti gay prejudice should not be underestimated. Such prejudice has endured at an institutional level in some cases, and despite very positive legislative and other policy changes nationally, continues to be a significant constraint to developing services that specifically meet the needs of gay people. The need for a safe place for gay people in Waterford was also stressed. Given the lack of discussion of gay issues in the city, there was a need for more information and promotion of awareness and understanding. The absence of links between mainstream services and the few gay services that existed was also highlighted - for example, between the Parents Support Group and various parenting programmes and services.

7 . The results of the Combat Poverty Agency Report Poverty: Lesbians and Gay Men, which is the only comprehensive study available on the effects of anti-gay discrimination was an invaluable resource in informing this discussion.

RESOURCE GROUP

An important issue also raised by those agencies developing close links with the gay community was the need for consistent and on-going support for building the capacity of the community. It was suggested that a resource group, comprising lesbian and gay people and mainstream community development representation, be set up to provide this necessary support. Support for the engagement of a community worker was also considered essential. A successful funding application for a sessional worker was sent to Waterford area Partnership.

AREA DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT (ADM)

A meeting was also held at the end of the project with representatives of ADM to discuss its potential role in terms of integrating the issue of gay and lesbian social exclusion into their work. Also discussed was the resourcing of an initiatives to support local area partnership in taking on projects similar to that undertaken by the Waterford Area Partnership.

MINISTER FOR LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

A meeting was held with Mr. Chris Flood TD, the Minister for State with responsibility for Local Development, to discuss issues arising from the project. A wide range of topics were discussed including mainstreaming the lessons of the Waterford partnership project at national level and to other local partnerships, naming gay people in the next National Development Plan⁸ and the potential at EU level for naming and inclusion of lesbians and gay men in relevant EU programmes. The need for national support structures and programmes for effective action at local level to support the inclusion of gay people was also highlighted, including the potential role of ADM in this respect. Other issues discussed included the potential role of the Local Employment Service, the National Drugs Strategy, early school leaving programmes, community enterprise, youth issues and homelessness. The Minister requested to be kept informed of any joint initiatives by Gay HIV Strategies in these areas.

The Minister undertook to launch and write a preface for this report. The Minister also undertook to follow-up on a range of issues with relevant agencies and other government departments.

4.OUTCOMES

The principle outcomes of the development project were as follows:

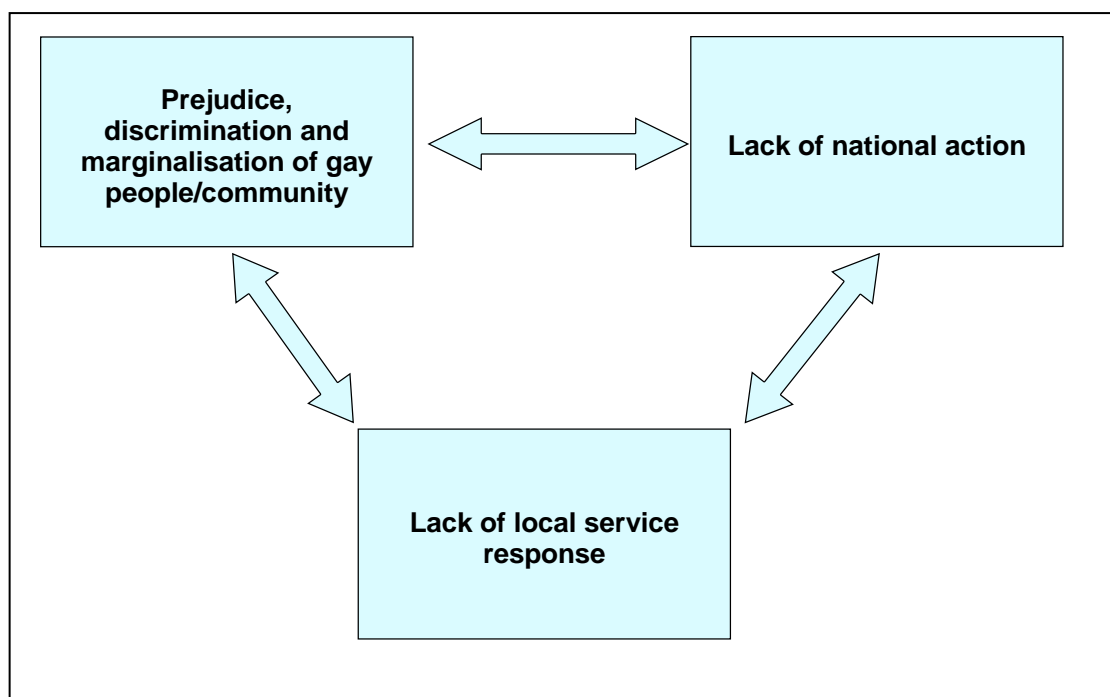
- A community development process that built confidence and resulted in the formation of a working group which has organised a series of events and produced information materials.
- The ground work was laid for the establishment of a Resource Group comprising lesbian and gay representatives and those with expertise in mainstream community development and service provision. The objective is to provide consistent ongoing support for the continuation of this development process. The Partnership has also provided some resources to employ a sessional worker to support the work of volunteers in the process.

8 . A submission on this issue was made by Gay HIV Strategies to the Minister for Finance.

- The integration of gay community needs into the programmes of some mainstream statutory/voluntary services. Prime examples of this are:
 - The commitment of Waterford Area Partnership to continue its support for the gay community development process started by this project. This has included additional funding and continued support from the Community Development Worker. The Partnership also put forward this project as an illustrative case study for inclusion in a national evaluation programme of partnership funded community development initiatives.
 - Waterford Regional Youth Services has taken responsibility for supporting initiatives to respond to the needs of gay youth. This has included organising a week-end away for gay youth to discuss needs and the provision of on-going support, including support for the development of a gay youth group.
 - Waterford Regional Youth Services have offered to provide office accommodation and other support for GayLine. This is a major support for a group with few resources.
 - Waterford Regional Youth Services played a major role in the recent initiative of the National Youth Federation to organise the first conference on youth services and gay and lesbian youth.
 - Local services including, the Probation and Welfare Service, STI Clinic (Regional Hospital), the Health Promotion Service (SEHB) and Waterford Regional Youth Services agreed immediately to stock the Parents Support booklet and leaflet. This is important in getting a wider distribution of gay information material and also helps indicate that the service is gay friendly.
 - A number of agencies including the Department of Social Community and Family Affairs, the South Eastern Health Board and Waterford Corporation agreed to consider resourcing appropriate initiatives.
 - Garter Lane (Arts Centre) and the Arts Officer of Waterford Corporation have expressed interest in providing for a photographic exhibition documenting the gay/lesbian community.
 - The documenting of the project allowed for a wider learning to take place and for mainstreaming at national level and in relation to other partnerships.

5.CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Figure 1: Negative Cycle of Marginalisation and Local Underdevelopment



5.1 Conclusions

This development project has made an important start in building the capacity of the gay community in Waterford and in developing linkages with the statutory/voluntary regarding the needs of gay men and lesbians. It is clear however, that there are powerful forces and barriers inhibiting effective action to combat the social exclusion of gay men and lesbians.

A range of factors can be identified as particularly important in facilitating or constraining the development process.

FACILITATING FACTORS

- Being a Waterford Area Partnership commissioned project was crucial to gaining access to key personnel in statutory and voluntary agencies/organisations.
- Previous work undertaken by the Waterford Assembly provided an important basis for development.
- In the capacity building process it was important to focus on responding to immediate needs and in Waterford, as in other areas, the immediate priority for gay people is addressing the absence of opportunities for people to meet and socialise. Creating opportunities for people to meet and socialise is also a prerequisite for a community to organise.
- Proactive support of key personnel in agencies is essential if progress is to be made in developing service responses to gay clients.

- It was important that the project organisers had a good understanding of gay community issues as well as the wider community development context. The two reports *HIV Prevention Strategies and the Gay Community* (GLEN/Nexus, 1996) and the Combat Poverty Agency publication *Poverty: Lesbians and Gay Men* (GLEN/Nexus, 1995) were particularly important resources.
- Initiatives undertaken at a national level by Gay HIV Strategies, which is core funded by the Department of Health and Children, were an important input. For example, the partnership process with the Eastern Health Board provided a useful model for gay community/statutory sector collaboration. The Parent's Support Booklet and the posters funded under the Eastern Health Board and NSSB initiatives were also valuable resources.

CONSTRAINTS

A number of factors can be seen as constraining the development process in the area. These primarily relate to the limiting effects of prejudice and discrimination and the lack of serious action at national level to combat this form of social exclusion (see Figure 1). The following are especially important in this regard.

- The most important fact to remember about gay community development is that it must operate in a context of high levels of prejudice and discrimination and that this is a fundamental restriction on progress. Fear of prejudice and discrimination tends to keep the gay community isolated and severely restricts its capacity to organise openly. Fear of negative reactions can also inhibit the response from service providers.
- A related effect of prejudice and discrimination is that the gay community is largely invisible and the needs and circumstances of gay people are hidden from policy makers and service providers. This creates a negative cycle where problems affecting gay people are either unrecognised or seen as insignificant and so the appropriate service responses are not developed.
- The problems of social exclusion affecting the gay community in Waterford are in many ways an aspect of a national problem and so require a national response. For example, while local educational providers could take action to combat anti-gay prejudice, in the absence of national direction and support progress is more difficult.
- In the Local Development Programme at a national level lesbians and gay men are not named and few if any resources have been committed to tackling social exclusion as it affects the gay community. This project in Waterford had to operate without the type of ADM funded support structure available to other communities of interest. For example, Pavee Point is funded at national level to provide a resource for partnerships and community groups, helping them to access the Travelling community in their area and providing advice on project and activities to include Travellers within the Local Development Programme (ADM, 1997:33).
- The lack of national resourcing for gay community development at national level has a variety of consequence including limited linkages between mainstream and gay community development, lack of documented approaches and methods to gay community development appropriate to different contexts and lack of training on gay issues for either mainstream or gay community development workers/volunteers.

- Community development is a slow process that needs on-going resources and energising, particularly in the gay community where high levels of stigmatisation leads to low levels of individual and collective self-esteem.

5.2 Recommendations

WATERFORD AREA/SOUTH EAST REGION

“Waterford Area Partnership Ltd. has set out to ensure that those that do not presently enjoy the full quality of life that Waterford has to offer, will be encouraged and offered the opportunity to participate and enjoy equality of opportunity—regardless of class, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, age or disability”. (Waterford Area Partnership Annual Report, 1997)

This development project has been an important start (unique in context of the Local Development Programme nationally) in implementing the Waterford Area Partnership’s social exclusion policy in relation to lesbians and gay men. The following recommendations have emerged from this development process and are capable of being implemented in the short term. These actions recommended can then be evaluated in order to provide a basis for more comprehensive action in the medium term. The strategy to tackle social exclusion in a fundamental way would need to address all constraints and facilitating factors outlined above.

- The Waterford Area Partnership should continue to support and resource the development of the gay community and ensure that lesbian and gay social exclusion issues are integrated into its range of programmes. All partnership programmes are relevant – however, we would highlight the following as being immediately significant.
 - The Partnership should support the development of the Resource Group which has been established to oversee and encourage the continuation of this community capacity building process. The Resource Group includes people from relevant mainstream services and from the lesbian and gay community.
 - Education: A pilot project should be initiated to identify appropriate responses to the problems gay and lesbian students experience which have been identified by the Combat Poverty Report and the Waterford Regional Youth Services Report (1996) and which contribute to early school leaving. In developing this pilot project useful connections could be made with key gay community organisations such as Parents Support.
 - Employment: Lesbians and gay men should be identified as a target group for the proposed Local Employment Service.
 - There should be representation of gay and lesbian interests on relevant Partnership Committees.
 - The Waterford Area Partnership should initiate a joint venture with the three other partnerships in the South East region⁹ to develop regional initiatives to combat social exclusion as it affects lesbians and gay men. One possible initiative that could be undertaken is the joint funding of a community development worker for the lesbian and gay community in the region.

9 . Waterford County, Waterford Area, Wexford Area and Wexford County partnerships.

- The Waterford Area Partnership and ADM should promote this report as a resource for similar initiatives and circulate it to other partnerships, relevant government departments and agencies, community development networks and gay and lesbian groups.
- The lesbian and gay community, relevant agencies and individuals should support the development of a Resource Group. The function of the Resource Group is to access resources to build the capacity of the gay/lesbian community, to provide necessary services and to build linkages with mainstream agencies.
- Waterford Regional Youth Services should continue to provide support for a gay/lesbian Youth Group and should build on the already valuable work undertaken to make its general services more accessible to gay youth.
- All services and agencies should identify the particular needs of its gay/lesbian clients and develop appropriate responses in consultation with the lesbian and gay community.
- The South Eastern Health Board should develop an integrated strategy for health promotion and the provision of accessible/appropriate health services for gay people with specific reference to HIV and AIDS.
- The Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs should resource gay community development initiatives and services. In particular it should fund a lesbian and gay community development worker responsible to the Resource Group.
- Waterford Corporation should, as part of its arts and cultural programme, support gay cultural initiatives. These could be undertaken jointly with the gay community and arts organisations such as Garter Lane. Garter Lane already has a track record in supporting gay community events.

NATIONAL LEVEL

With regard to the Local Development Programme nationally, a possible way forward in terms of mainstreaming the issue of gay disadvantage is the establishment of a working party under the auspices of the Minister of State with responsibility for Local Development. The objective of this working party could be to consider initiatives to tackle gay social exclusion and identify ways in which gay community groups and local partnerships could collaborate more effectively. A working group might include relevant government departments, ADM, some local partnerships, those with relevant expertise in mainstream community development and gay/lesbian community development. It would be difficult to overestimate the potential of such a working group in beginning to tackle this form of social exclusion in an integrated way.

In order to implement their stated equality policy, ADM should develop a strategy and programme of action to integrate the issue of gay and lesbian social exclusion into their work. ADM should also resource initiatives to support local area partnerships in taking on projects similar to that undertaken by the Waterford Area Partnership. ADM should also recommend that lesbians and gay men be specifically named in any successor to the Operational Programme for Local, Urban and Rural Development. FAS nationally should develop a positive action plan to address discrimination against gay men and lesbians in order to provide the policy context, which seems necessary for its regional offices to take action.

While it is not necessarily a core objective of this study to make recommendations in relation to other national policy and programmes, the results emerging from this research show that such national action is necessary if local action is to be effective. The recommendations made in the Combat Poverty Agency report *Poverty: Lesbians and Gay Men* provides an agenda for action in addressing lesbian and gay disadvantage in areas such education/training, employment, services, health, support networks and community development. The recommendations made by the National Economic and Social Forum are also relevant in relation to equality proofing and the proposed Task Force on Discrimination against Lesbians and Gay Men. The recent National anti-Poverty Strategy Guidelines on Poverty/Equality Proofing, which explicitly names sexual orientation, provides a valuable framework for the integration of lesbian and gay social exclusion issues and should be utilised by all relevant agencies.

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APPENDIX 2: CONTACTS

Gay HIV Strategies, Fumbally Court, Fumbally Lane, Dublin 8. Tel. 01-4730599. Fax. 01-4730597.
Email. ghs@nexus.ie

Waterford Area Partnership, Unit 4, Westgate Business Centre, Tramore Road, Waterford. Tel. 051-841740. Fax. 051-843153. Email areapart@iol.ie

Waterford Regional Youth Services, Edmund Rice Youth and Community centre, Manor Street, Waterford. Tel. 051-872710/853650. Email wrys@iol.ie

GayLine, tel. 051-879907 Wed. 7.30-9.30pm. PO Box 24 GPO Waterford.

Gay Switchboard Dublin. Tel. 01-8721055, Sunday to Friday 8-10.00pm. Saturday 3.30-6.00pm.
Carmichael House, North Brunswick Street, Dublin 7.

Parents Support (support group for parents of lesbians and gay men). Contact Gay Switchboard or GayLine.

Lesbian Education and Awareness, 5 Capel Street, Dublin 1. Tel 01-8720460. Email leanow@indigo.ie

Citizen Information Centres, Youth Information Centres, Centres for the Unemployed and other information giving organisations, such as public libraries, who use the NSSB (National Social Services Board) Citizens Information Database have a set of fact-sheets about issues affecting lesbians and gay men covering a wide range of topics.