



Including intersectional identities in Scotland

by Sam Rankin



A lot of equality work focuses on one kind of equality like disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity or gender identity. This is really good when focusing on key issues. However, if we only focus on one type of equality at a time then we can miss issues that affect people who fall into two or more of these identity groups at the same time (also known as intersectional identities).



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For example, some transgender people with disabilities who have carers can find it difficult to get the carers to dress them in the clothes that they prefer. LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex) asylum seekers can find it hard to get lawyers who understand LGBTI issues in various countries. It can be impossible for deaf or migrant LGBTI people to access services and groups that have little or no funding for interpreters. Disabled and minority ethnic LGBTI people can face exclusion and discrimination in LGBTI, disability and minority ethnic focused groups, for example some can suffer from racism within an LGBTI group. For all of these reasons, people who are in more than one minority group may be less willing to be open about aspects of their identity that are not visible, less likely to access services and need more time and support to explain their situations. While our work does not have a specific focus on youth, the methodologies we have used and the lessons we have learned can be applied to all intersections, including those with age.

Organisations need to understand that people can have very unique and complex issues if they are in more than one minority group. They need to be able to direct people confidently to additional services. They should provide training specifically on intersectionality, ensure that the images and language they use are truly diverse and work with intersectional people to make their services properly inclusive and safe. Organisations can find some of these things quite easy but others difficult. Some staff may be scared to signpost people to other services where they may experience discrimination. For example, an organisation may be worried about referring a LGBTI asylum seeker to a church that provides emergency food. An organisation may find it difficult to find the time to train staff or the money to redo leaflets. They may be

worried about the reactions of some of their service users or they may just not know where to start.

To help organisations to be more inclusive of all LGBTI people the Equality Network has a specific focus on intersectionality. The Equality Network is an independent charity that works for LGBTI equality and human rights in Scotland. For the past six years we have had a major focus on intersectional work. We started by doing the first research in Scotland on minority ethnic LGBTI people and services. We then set up a local network of organisations that wanted to work together on intersectional issues. These groups met four times a year to train each other, build trust, develop better signposting between each other and do small activities on intersectionality. Some of these were one-off events, poster campaigns or sharing stalls at events. We also developed intersectional-specific training modules and provided one-to-one mentoring for intersectional activists who fed into all of our work. We also participated in Beyond Borders, a two-year project that focused on including culturally diverse LGBTI people in five European countries.

We were then approached by the Scottish Government to do similar work but focused on disability. So we did Scotland's first research on disabled LGBTI people and services, incorporated disability as a major theme in our local networks, developed training modules focused on disability and LGBTI and recruited disabled LGBTI activists to feed into all of this work. We ran these two projects for a couple of years and then merged them together. Our training now covers LGBTI intersections with race and disability and we have published practical resources for organisations on how to best include intersectional LGBTI people in their services.

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There are a few key principles we have followed throughout this work that have made it successful. Firstly, we have never seen ourselves as experts or as the people who have all the answers. Rather, we see ourselves as creators of spaces in which we can all learn from each other. In this approach partnership work has been the most important. We have worked in close partnership with a wide variety of race and disability equality organisations and public sector organisations. Secondly, we have worked hard on developing relationships with intersectional LGBTI people and have had all our work led by their voices, experiences and ideas. This has taken a lot of time but has been vital to making the work authentic and relevant. Thirdly, we have been flexible and open to different approaches, experimentation and learning. We have consulted widely, incorporated many different views and aimed for respectful debate rather than consensus. But most of all we wanted people and organisations to have a sense of ownership in the work and see it as much theirs as ours. Finally, we have had to be realistic about what is achievable and strategic about spending effort where it would have the most impact.

Now, six years into this work we are focusing on maximising our capacity to do training by training trainers, focusing on key issues with our networks such as access to health care and combating hate crime, and working on better intersex inclusion. We are still learning from our partners, developing our own skills and looking for new ways of doing things. There is no “right” or “wrong” way to do this work. There is only trying to include people or closing our eyes to exclusion.

NOTES ON PICTURES:

1. Doing real-life case studies is an important part of our intersectional training. This helps organisations to understand the wide variety of issues we face and explore ideas for helping us.
2. Participants in “Breaking Out of the Boxes” a three-day residential for intersectional LGBTI people to explore our experiences and ideas for improving services through arts focused workshops. The resulting film and resources can be downloaded from the Equality Network website.
3. We had the first stall at a Pride in Scotland that had information from LGBTI, race and disability equality organisations. This was only possible through partnership work with these organisations.

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Top tips for including intersectional people

All organisations can be more inclusive of intersectionality. The good news is that most of the actions needed to do this do not cost much.

1 Develop your knowledge

Learn about the specific and complex issues intersectional people face. Talk with a variety of intersectional people, join intersectional groups on social media and read up on black feminism.

3 Be led by intersectional people

Develop relationships with intersectional people and groups. Consult with them about your work and help them with theirs.

5 Update your marketing and information resources

Send out the message that you are inclusive. Make sure that your language is inclusive and the pictures you use are diverse. Check that you refer to the needs and issues of different people.

2 Work in partnership

Build partnerships with LGBTI, disability and race equality organisations.

4 Review your systems

Do you set aside money for interpretation? Are people able to change their name and gender easily? Are your facilities accessible? Do you have a comprehensive code of conduct? A full checklist of the kinds of questions you should be asking yourself is available in the “Breaking Out of the Boxes” section on our website.

Further reading

For more information on our work and practical ideas for including intersectional people see www.equality-network.org/our-work/intersectional/

For a comprehensive list of website resources on intersectionality go to the links pages of: <http://beyondbordersproject.wordpress.com/>

If you have any questions or comments I would love to hear from you: sam@equality-network.org

