



All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Integration

Address: APPG on Social Integration, c/o Chuka Umunna MP
House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

Email: APPG.SocialIntegration@the-challenge.org

Website: SocialIntegrationAPPG.org.uk

Telephone: 07722553856

Notes from Visit to West Midlands – 06/09/2018

Present (APPG members)

- APPG Chair – Chuka Umunna MP
- Dame Caroline Spelman MP

Present (others)

- One member of staff from the Chair's office
- Two members of staff from The Challenge (the Secretariat)
- Steph Keeble, Director, Birmingham LGBT
- James Wharton, Wellbeing Service Manager, Birmingham LGBT
- Adrienne Frances, Senior Arts Officer, Birmingham LGBT
- Maria Hughes, Ageing Better Co-ordinator, Birmingham LGBT
- Rico Johnson-Sinclair, Ageing With Pride Campaign Manager, Birmingham LGBT
- Sajida Bandali, Senior Independent Domestic Violence Advocate, Birmingham LGBT
- Jo Bagby, Ageing Better in Birmingham Core Strategic Partnership
- Sophy Proctor, Head of Funding (Ageing Better), Big Lottery Fund
- Emily Price, Co-ordinator, Three Trees Community Centre
- Kris Chase-Byrne, Chair, Northern Star Community Arts
- Helen Roberts, Community Project Worker, Northern Star Community Arts
- Councillor Karen Grinsell, Conservative councillor for Shirley East Ward, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care & Health at Solihull Council

Session One: Rainbow Bridge – Birmingham LGBT Centre

Alongside Chuka Umunna MP, and members of staff from his office as well as the APPG's Secretariat, The Challenge, this session included representatives from Birmingham LGBT, Ageing Better in Birmingham and the Big Lottery Fund, as well as service users of different ages.

- We were introduced to participants in the Rainbow Bridge project, which brings people together of **different sexualities and ages** for coffee morning-style events. The aim is for people of different backgrounds to understand one another better, and learn about activities, groups and services that they might be interested in.
- In addition to attracting individuals from a range of sexualities and age groups, Chuka praised the group for bringing together people from a **wide net of geographical areas**,

including Coventry, Walsall, Nottingham and Wolverhampton. The Rainbow Bridge project therefore cuts across numerous different social fault lines in its integrative aims.

- Rainbow Bridge is one of the intergenerational projects run by the **Ageing Better in Birmingham** initiative, which is itself funded by the **Big Lottery Fund**. The Rainbow Bridge project is aimed at furthering one of the four main priorities that Ageing Better have set out in trying to make life as fulfilling as possible for the elderly population in Birmingham – **ensuring that the older LGBT community “does not go back into the closet”**.
- A number of participants in the Rainbow Bridge project spoke about the **particular challenges that older LGBT people face**, given the less open and liberal attitude that many of their generation have towards people of LGBT sexuality, and sex in general. Older participants spoke about how they had not felt able to ‘come out’ in younger life, given the stereotypes around masculinity which prevailed at that time, and the ‘pub culture’ which they had been part of. And participants spoke about the ageist attitudes that continue to exist in today’s society: older people are often not associated with sex, whereas the term ‘LGBT’ usually is – add these two things together, and many people do not consider older LGBT to be a group in need of particular support.
- The **intergenerational aspect** of Rainbow Bridge was suggested to be beneficial by some participants firstly because older LGBT people are able to share their experiences of being LGBT in a different generation with younger participants, who would not understand what it was like to live in a time when being homosexual was illegal, or when cultural stereotypes and pressures made it much more difficult to ‘come out’ and express sexuality. Older LGBT participants are also able to support younger LGBT participants with the process of ‘coming out’, and being confident in their sexuality.
- Likewise, younger participants of all sexualities are able to share the perspectives of a different generation with older participants, particularly as these relate to more open and liberal attitudes to LGBT people and sex. One participant suggested it might sometimes be younger people who can provide support to older LGBT people in encouraging them to be more open about their sexuality.

Session Two: Ageing Better in Birmingham/Big Lottery Fund

Alongside Chuka Umunna MP, and members of staff from his office as well as the APPG’s Secretariat, **The Challenge**, this session included representatives from Birmingham LGBT, Ageing Better in Birmingham and the Big Lottery Fund.

Discussion proceeded as follows:

- Chuka re-iterated his praise for the Rainbow Bridge project in terms of the range of different geographical areas from which it attracts people. Members of the discussion said it achieved this in part due to the **lack of adequate services for older people**, and in particular older LGBT people, who face prejudice due to their identity from both care staff and other residents. One participant emphasised that this plight was magnified for the transgender community.

- Chuka asked how this prejudice could be countered, to which it was suggested that **personalised care payments** offered one of the best solutions in empowering people to manage their care needs. Chuka acknowledged the benefits personalised care payments can bring, but noted that they could be a highly politicised issue due to entrenched ideological beliefs around choice in the care system. However, he did suggest that **further devolution** of powers could offer a potential solution, allowing policies to be determined according to regional priorities.
- Representatives from Ageing Better in Birmingham spoke about the reasons for Birmingham being chosen as a hub for the Ageing Better project, highlighting its multi-dimensional diversity. **Sparkbrook**, for example, is a melting pot of different ethnic groups and **integration efforts in the area are geared towards connecting people across both generations and ethnic groups.**
- Ageist attitudes make it harder for older LGBT people to live safe, secure and healthy lives – for example, one member of the discussion said that **housing providers** are often not aware of the experiences and needs of older LGBT people. Rainbow Bridge are planning to hold a series of **coffee mornings with housing associations** to raise awareness of these issues.
- In addition to this, Rainbow Bridge put on **pop-up breakfast events in care homes and community centres**, in order to break the ice and dispel any preconceptions that people may have about the LGBT community. It was noted that this was especially beneficial for those elderly LGBT people who were recipients of care, and felt unable to complain about their treatment due to their reliance on staff who were the very people holding misguided preconceptions.
- Birmingham LGBT's open-door policy to the whole community tended to result in very busy **Christmas days**, which see a mix of **asylum seekers, vulnerable young people** as well as a **cross sections of individuals from the LGBT community**, who might otherwise face spending the day alone, gathering together. Participants emphasised the importance of community initiatives such as Rainbow Bridge for tackling **social isolation and loneliness.**
- Chuka asked what the appeal was for **non-LGBT persons** in accessing the services offered, and it was suggested that this was largely due to their diversity of activities, especially those relating to well-being, which have proved to be very popular for all users. Despite this, non-LGBT persons account for just 4% of their users, which means an overwhelming majority are from the LGBT community.
- Chuka then asked the group whether projects such as Ageing Better in Birmingham and Rainbow Bridge had benefited from the West Midlands now having its own **devolved authority**, with a mayor. Participants said they had not seen any tangible changes as a result of this as yet, but were hopeful that devolution would bring about positive change.
- Sophy Proctor, Head of Funding at the **Big Lottery Fund**, confirmed that the **£78 million** fund for Ageing Better was playing a key role in encouraging people aged 50 and over to be actively involved in their communities. She emphasised that the Fund's support is targeted at **grassroots initiatives** in order to maximise social benefit and encourage positive practices.

- Participants emphasised the importance of the availability of a **diverse range of funding streams**. This enables projects run by Ageing Better in Birmingham to draw on funding pots from the Big Lottery Fund as well as the NHS, for example, and prevents them from becoming reliant on cash-strapped local authorities.
- However, participants did say that increased funding was needed so that projects like Rainbow Bridge could be overseen by paid staff, rather than being run exclusively by volunteers. That was the problem with David Cameron’s **‘Big Society’ idea**, said some participants – it left beneficial community projects completely in the hands of volunteers, whilst austerity led to cuts to vital funding streams.
- Chuka asked the group whether parliament came across as being out of touch with the challenges that were being faced by the organisation. Participants suggested that MPs such as **Jess Phillips MP** convey a much greater sense of awareness of the challenges facing the third sector compared to other colleagues who had no first-hand experience of these. It was argued by some participants that having MPs with **grassroots experience** was very important to the sector.
- One participant said one of the main challenges facing the charity sector related to the **reporting and regulation requirements** placed on civil society organisations. Another participant argued that greater streamlining would enable organisations to be more effective while still being compliant.

Session Three: Three Trees Community Centre

Alongside Chuka Umunna MP, and members of staff from his office as well as the APPG’s Secretariat, **The Challenge**, this session included Dame Caroline Spelman MP, Councillor Karen Grinsell, and representatives from Three Trees Community Centre and Northern Star Community Arts.

- Formerly a **Baptist Church**, Three Trees Community Centre received its new name in 2014 as part of a **major upgrade and improvement**. It has been a pivotal part of community life since the 1970s, when it ran a nursery, coffee bar, lunch clubs and the area’s first shop. Nowadays, its activities include parent and toddler groups, martial arts, a choir and music clubs – which **attract different age groups** from throughout the area.
- The Centre provides a hub at which a range of **local delivery partners** provide services and put on activities, including at the next-door **Northern Star Community Arts**. Northern Star offers a range of arts-based activities for all members of the community, to “improve social cohesion, raise aspiration” and give people the “skills and confidence to address issues in their lives and community”.
- The Centre’s activities include a stitch ‘n’ knit club, ukulele band and youth forum. While many of its activities are deliberately intergenerational, including a scheme through which older people teach younger people how to sew, even those which are not often attract individuals from a diverse range of age groups.

- As well as bringing people from different backgrounds together, many of the Centre's services and activities offer **opportunities for young people to gain skills** and enhance their employment prospects. For example, the **Urban Heard project** which operates within the Centre offers skills training to young people who have behavioural issues, or have experienced problems with alcohol, drugs and crime. Through some of the programmes offered at the Centre, young people are able to gain qualifications.
- Chuka commented that Three Trees reminded him of similar **faith-based organisations** in his own constituency of Streatham, which provide a range of vital services for the entire community, not only for people of the same faith as the centre, or indeed of any faith at all. The staff from Three Trees said it had been difficult in the past to convince the local community that it was a centre for *all* people, regardless of faith, but that it now enjoyed a good reputation in the area.
- Participants said the Centre's future was more secure because it was not reliant on public sector funding from a local authority. A large part of its funding has come from the **Big Lottery Fund**.

Next Steps

- The next visit as part of the APPG's inquiry into intergenerational connection is taking place at Apples and Honey Nightingale House, the first intergenerational nursery in the UK, on Friday, September 28th 2018.
- Together with the invaluable insights gained from visits to Manchester (21.06.18), south London (20.07.18) and this visit to the West Midlands, the evidence and observations gathered from this visit will help inform the interim and final reports of the inquiry – due to be launched in early 2019 and summer 2019 respectively.