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Chair’s Report

Hello!

This is my first year as the chair of Birmingham LGBT, and it has ended in a way I don’t think anyone would have thought possible this time last year.

I want to start by thanking the whole staff and volunteer team in how they reacted and responded to the Covid-19 pandemic back in March. Although we all have personal concerns and challenges, they continued to provide services, albeit in a different way, to our community.

It’s the diverse make up of Birmingham that makes the city extraordinarily special, and within Birmingham, our LGB and T community is similarly diverse and unique. Birmingham LGBT is open to all within our community and has continued to deliver and develop a wide range of services and projects during the year.

Over the next few pages you’ll see a wonderful selection of photos, statistics and details of this last year. Don’t forget that behind every smiling face and statistic is a person who is being supported, a staff team working hard, often not in the spotlight, and a project that is being funded in one way or another.

In addition to thanking our staff and volunteers for all their hard work, I also sincerely thank our donors and funders. Without your support we would not be able to deliver the outcomes that are in this report and would not be the charity that we are today.

As we look to the year ahead, the continued support to our community will become all the more crucial. Although there is a ‘new norm’, the global pandemic is ongoing, and the longer term impact – not only on our physical health but also our mental health – is yet to be understood.

I look forward to continuing to work with Director Steph Keeble and my fellow board members, and will always stand up for and champion the charity and community.

Enjoy the report and very best wishes,

Ian Hyde - Chair
BIRMINGHAM LGBT’S MISSION IS TO BUILD A VIBRANT, DIVERSE LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANS COMMUNITY IN BIRMINGHAM IN WHICH INDIVIDUALS CAN REALISE THEIR FULL POTENTIAL AND HAVE EQUAL ACCESS TO ALL THE CITY HAS TO OFFER
Director’s Report

It has been another successful year for Birmingham LGBT, with some key achievements and developments.

The period from April 2019 – March 2020 has been a successful one for Birmingham LGBT. While continuing to deliver our core services, including the LGBT Health & Wellbeing Centre, SHOUT (Birmingham’s Festival of Queer Culture), the Umbrella sexual health contract, our wellbeing support service, the LGBT domestic violence project and the Ageing Better LGBT Hub, Birmingham LGBT also developed new services during the year which means we have been able further to expand our service offer to the lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans community in the city.

We were successful in a bid to the National Lottery Reaching Communities Fund, for a project aimed at developing specialist support for the trans community, including wellbeing support and counselling. The project also delivers awareness training to health and social care providers. We recruited staff to the roles and started delivering the project during autumn of this year. We also received funding from Children in Need to appoint a youth worker and expand our youth provision, and successfully tendered for a social care contract to deliver training to care homes and commissioners.

The year saw a number of other key achievements: we completed delivery of the Ageing with Pride campaign and developed and piloted the Rainbow Project, a group work programme for LBT women affected by domestic violence. It was also the 10th anniversary of our SHOUT Festival of Queer Arts and Culture, which was headlined by one of the most influential film directors of the past 50 years, the king of camp John Waters, a queer icon best known for his seminal counter-cultural comedies which celebrate deviance and alternative lifestyles, including Hairspray and Pink Flamingos.

Birmingham LGBT continued to develop and expand our sexual health services in partnership with University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Trust, and continued to be represented on several key strategic partnerships, including the National LGB&T Strategic Partnership.

We have also continued to support LGBT community groups, providing them with free meeting space at the LGBT Centre. More than twenty-two groups continued to meet at the Centre throughout the year.

While there were many positive achievements for us, the year also brought a number of challenges, and in mid-March we shut down face-to-face services due to the increasing threat from the global pandemic. All staff started working remotely as the building closed, and we needed to adapt our services, and offer digital and phone support. It was a challenging time for everyone involved, and the staff worked really hard through this difficult period and the ongoing pandemic to ensure we continued to deliver vital services to the community.
I would like to finish by saying a big thank you to all the staff, volunteers and board members who have worked so hard over the last twelve months to make Birmingham LGBT such a great organisation.

I would also like to thank all our partners, stakeholders, donors, and funders, who have been committed to the vision and values of Birmingham LGBT and have enabled us to develop our service offer to the local LGBT community. I am extremely proud of the LGBT Health & Wellbeing Centre, and everything we have all achieved together.

*Steph Keeble - Director*
7480 Instances of Support
22 Community Groups met at the LGBT Centre
80 New people accessed the IDVA Service

1290 Volunteer Hours
5136 Visits to the LGBT Centre
979 HIV Point of Care Tests

23 Active Volunteers
679 Ageing Better Events
106 Trans inclusion project counselling sessions
120
Volunteer training hours

490
New Ageing
Better Participants

3
Trans awareness talks
OUR SERVICES
Wellbeing Services

I started in post as Operations Manager Wellbeing Services in early December 2019, after 18 years working in the arts. I currently manage six strands of externally-funded project work across the service, some ongoing and others fixed-term: SHOUT Festival of Queer Arts & Culture, Ageing Better, the Trans Inclusion Project, Wellbeing, Nightingale50, and Changing Practice in Adult Social Care. Four months in, like the rest of the country, we went into lockdown, and so I have had to get to grips with the projects and team from my kitchen table.

The Wellbeing function offers individual appointments with service users, supporting them with emotional support and setting themselves goals to improve their overall wellbeing. As part of this support, workshops were organised for the community on anxiety management and mindfulness.

It was a good year for SHOUT, with an extended festival to celebrate our tenth anniversary.

The Ageing Better LGBT Hub works to reduce and combat isolation in the 50+ age group, working with volunteers from the LGBT+ communities to set up new groups and activities, and develop existing groups. In 2019-20, 679 individual events took place, which introduced 490 new participants to Ageing Better LGBT groups. 11 new groups and activities were formed, with seven older people involved in forming and running them.

The Trans Inclusion Project launched in the summer of 2019, and is funded by the National Lottery Community Fund. It has three main strands of delivery, focusing on the needs of the trans community in Birmingham and the surrounding areas – wellbeing support, therapeutic counselling, and training for healthcare providers and other organisations that come in to contact with trans people and wish to improve their knowledge and care. A Trans Advisory Panel was recruited, to advise and work with the team, under the principle of ‘nothing about us, without us’. The team hold regular wellbeing events for the trans community, ranging from anxiety workshops to a forum to discuss ideas and topics of national importance.

Changing Practice in Adult Social Care is a support and training package, delivered alongside Stonewall Housing, which aims to equip social care providers with the necessary skills and knowledge to work with older LGBT people in their care. The project is commissioned by BVSC as part of the Lottery-funded Ageing Better in Birmingham programme.

I have really enjoyed my first months at Birmingham LGBT and look forward to continuing to make a difference to the community in the future.

Jo Muskett – Operations Manager, Wellbeing Services
Sexual Health Services

This has been a very busy and successful year for our sexual health services.

Birmingham LGBT centre has partnered with Umbrella since 2015 to deliver LGBTQ-focused sexual health services across Birmingham and Solihull.

Our open access services operate 80 hours per week over seven days, offering Assisted Self-Sampling STI Testing and HIV rapid testing, as well as opportunities for one-to-one individualised support, information, and signposting for community members.

Most of our sexual health services operate on a walk-in basis, with additional access to our other services meaning that holistic health and wellbeing is being offered to those who attend sexual health services. Current opening hours are: 8am – 9pm Monday to Friday and 11.30am – 7pm Saturdays and Sundays (pre-Covid-19 closure).

Assisted Self Sampling STI Testing

This method of accessing STI testing involves one of our community sexual health outreach team delivering a 1:1 sexual health and wellbeing assessment with the client, before assisting the client with performing aspects of sample collection, using the Umbrella STI kits but with assistance where needed.

This is the preferred method of accessing STI testing, used by the vast majority of our clients, and in 2019-20 we performed 1274 Assisted STI Tests.

HIV Point of Care Testing (POCT)

This form of testing is frequently requested by our clients. It’s popular because of the ease of testing and speed of the result: this form of testing can be carried out in minutes.

This year we performed 979 HIV POC Tests.

Community Sexual Health Outreach and Pop Up STI Testing services

Our sexual health outreach team carry out regular off-site sexual health promotion and testing opportunities directly to the LGBT community, in a variety of settings through outreach work. These take place in LGBT venues, such as bars on the commercial gay scene, colleges and universities, or other locations where there is a significant LGBT community presence.

The majority of our outreach activities take the form of pop-up clinics where we offer Assisted Self-Sampling STI Testing and HIV rapid testing, information, advice and signposting. Other forms of outreach include online outreach on various dating/ hook-up sites such as Grindr, and at PSEs (Public Sex Environments) e.g. cruising & dogging areas.
6824
Brief interventions (less than 15 minutes)

3228
Specific interventions (15 mins – 1 hour)

42
Outreach sessions carried out

1274
Assisted STI Tests

979
HIV POC Tests
Clinical Services

Various NHS nurse or doctor-led sexual health clinics take place at the LGBT Centre each week, as part of our Umbrella partnership. These clinics are specifically for LGBTQ community members, offered via our fully functional clinical spaces.

Specialist LGBTQ clinics offered include two general symptomatic walk-in clinics weekly, two PrEP clinics weekly, and a monthly Trans sexual health clinic.

Birmingham LGBT’s community sexual health team work alongside clinical staff to co-facilitate the clinics’ throughput of patients, by offering a triage service to clinic attendees, offering information on our own and Umbrella’s other services and offering assisted self-sampling to those who are non-symptomatic or do not need to see a nurse for treatment, follow up or vaccination.

Peer Groups

The sexual health team facilitate various peer support groups for sections of the LGBTQ community with particular needs, or where there may be barriers to accessing other services.

These groups include, RANG – a group for South Asian and Middle Eastern MSM (men who have sex with men), Married Men’s Group (MMG) – a group for MSM who are married to women, and EMERGE – a group for young trans and non-binary people aged 13-19.

We also deliver sexual health and relationship-focussed workshops once a month to Out Central – Birmingham City Council’s LGBT youth group.

This year we have had 310 contacts with individuals via our group sessions.

Chemfidential – Chemsex Support

Chemfidential is Birmingham LGBT’s chemsex support service, which aims to support those who may need support relating to chemsex or problematic use of substances (colloquially referred to as “chems”).

The service supports individuals around a multitude of issues, including harm reduction measures such as consent and setting boundaries, approaches to safer sex, awareness of chems and possible detrimental effects, and can facilitate links into counselling, psychosexual services, and drug services where needed.
Volunteers form an essential part of the team providing our services and supporting the operation of the LGBT Centre. Volunteers also support the work of the Birmingham LGBT by carrying out a meet and greet role at events such as the Shout Festival, Pink Picnic and Pride events.
Volunteering

A new Volunteer & Peer Mentoring Coordinator, Siân Finn, was appointed to the role in November 2019, after a period where the post was vacant.

Birmingham LGBT’s volunteering service falls under the Sexual Health Services, and aims to improve wellbeing, sexual health and opportunities for the LGBTQI+ community across Birmingham, Solihull, and the wider West Midlands. Our volunteering roles are developed to support services across the organisation, creating opportunities for inclusion, visibility, and collaboration within and across the communities we serve and work with. Roles include:

- Meet and Greet (supports whole organisation)
- Sexual Health Outreach (Sexual Health Services)
- Admin Support (whole organisation)
- Peer Mentoring
- Training Support

All volunteers follow our recruitment process of completing an application form and attending an informal interview, before being accepted onto our core training programme. On 29th January 2020, 14 new volunteers attended a full day of training. Afterwards, DBS and reference checks are run. Additional training for each role is given once checks and DBS are successfully completed.

Meet and Greet requires at least two 4-hour sessions shadowing staff on reception. Relevant policies and the reception handbook need to be read before working solo on the front desk and supporting services across the organisation.

Sexual Health Outreach will require at least two hours’ shadowing staff on reception, to be more informed of the services we run. This is followed by introductions to the Sexual Health Team, with a schedule of events, pop-up clinics, and condom runs. Once training and introductions are complete, volunteers have direct contact with relevant staff members for volunteering activity. This role supports the Sexual Health Services.

Admin support requires an introduction to our administrator, who will train and coordinate volunteer activity once core training is complete. Admin support is ad hoc and supports services across the organisation.

Peer mentoring requires a further full day of training. Nine volunteers attended our peer mentor training on 8th March 2020. This role also requires at least two hours spent shadowing staff covering reception, to be more informed around the services we run. Mentoring supports clients accessing services across the organisation, and groups attending the Centre.

Training support requires an introduction to staff delivering training, internally or externally, is ad hoc, and introductions and briefings will be given by the coordinator and relevant staff member. This role supports services across the organisation.
Trans Inclusion Project

The Trans Inclusion Project is a new project funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, aimed at delivering specialist, culturally-competent wellbeing services to trans people, and providing training and policy support to health and social care providers.

Counselling

Clients are seen weekly, and the therapy that is offered is person-centred. The counselling is open-ended which allows clients who need longer term support the opportunity to receive this. Client feedback to date has been positive, with clients noting the sessions to be helpful, with some clients expressing that they have gained more awareness of themselves through our work together. It has been, and is, such a privilege to work with Trans and Non-Binary clients. I have grown and developed both professionally and personally, and cannot express how important this service is to the Trans community. The service that we offer is priceless and is a much-needed service, as is demonstrated by the real demand for the counselling service.

*Kiran, Counsellor*

Training

From when I started in October running until the end of March, I worked on building partnerships, recruiting a Trans Advisory Group for the project, and developing Trans Awareness Training.

I developed a 1½ hour Trans Awareness talk, that was delivered twice during Transgender Awareness week in November 2019, and again in February 2020 to promote the project and gather feedback to feed into a longer 3½ hour training session; as well as meeting with organisations to discuss their support needs in relation to transgender inclusion. Feedback from these talks were overwhelmingly positive, and interest in the project and training sessions has remained extremely high throughout.

Volunteers were recruited from the Birmingham trans community to form a Trans Advisory Group to feed into the project on the principle of “nothing about us without us”, and they provided vital feedback and experiences to include in the training programme.

*Robyn, Strategic Development Officer*

Wellbeing Support

I have seen 57 clients during this period, many of them have had more than one support session. The other strand to the role is organising events for the Trans community: two events were successfully run in quarter one, which include an event for Trans Day of Remembrance.

*Alexus, Wellbeing Support Worker*
IDVA Service

The Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy (IDVA) service at Birmingham LGBT is a vital service, funded by the Henry Smith Foundation, for LGBT people who are experiencing abuse from their partners, ex-partners, or family members.

Domestic abuse encompasses various types of abuse such as physical, sexual, financial, psychological, stalking and forced marriage, amongst others. Our IDVA service therefore offers a safe space for service users to discuss their options, and to seek advice and support tailored to their situation. This provides a platform for service users to then make informed decisions about their situation.

Our IDVA service also provides crisis intervention support, as well as advocacy, emotional and practical support, and safety planning.

“The IDVA has given me hope that there is a happy future for me. It has been so hard to get through my situation, but their positive assurance has been so refreshing.”

- IDVA service user

From April 2019 to March 2020, the IDVA service supported 80 new service users, in addition to providing ongoing support to current service users. This consisted of supporting 26 people experiencing intimate partner abuse, 25 people facing family abuse, and 26 people who were experiencing abuse from ex-partners.

During this period, Birmingham LGBT also had the invaluable opportunity to develop the innovative curriculum for the ‘The Rainbow Project’, which is funded by Comic Relief. This is a culturally-competent group work programme for Lesbian, Bisexual and Trans (LBT) women who have experienced, or are currently experiencing, domestic abuse. Following this, we launched the Rainbow Project as a pilot programme, which provided a safe space for LBT survivors to learn about domestic abuse and healthy relationships, as well as giving them an opportunity to share experiences and gain peer support.

“I’ve attended other support groups but nothing like the Rainbow Project, where I actually got to share my experiences with women who really understood what I had been through. Attending the programme really helped with reducing my social isolation.”

- IDVA service user
SHOUT Festival of Queer Arts and Culture 2019 took place from 5th – 17th November, in an expanded 13-day format to mark our 10th anniversary. The programme featured 23 events, combining performance, film, visual arts, talks, and workshops, which took place at 12 venues across the city. The Festival’s programme responded to recent events that had been impacting the LGBTQ+ community, and explored what the possibilities of a queer future might look like. Throughout the 2019 festival, we reached an audience of 56,566 people. Audience feedback referenced a sense of connection, of coming together and fostering new understanding, leading to change in ideas and actions.

This festival was definitely ground-breaking and made a real effort to challenge and change perceptions of the LGBTQ community addressing issues they face and presenting in a festival to celebrate the talents and culture of the queer community

–Arts Council Quality Assessment

SHOUT’s 2019-20 activity saw a number of significant achievements for the festival including:

- Bringing legendary Queer American director and comedian John Waters to Birmingham for the first time, performing on the main stage of the Birmingham Hippodrome.

- The launch of a new National Lottery Heritage Funded project, Nightingale50, including the installation of two newly commissioned murals by artist Frederik Anderson.

- We welcomed nearly 50 professionals from across the arts and cultural sector to a conference on making organisational change in order to include queer artists, audiences, and communities in meaningful ways.

- We produced Birmingham’s first large scale Vogue Ball, in partnership with Birmingham Hippodrome and DanceXchange, curated by Darren Pritchard. We welcomed houses from across the country, including Leeds, Newcastle, Manchester, Bristol, and Liverpool, with over 50 participants taking part in the performance.

- We worked with UNMUTED and Dan Daw Creative Projects to develop Birmingham’s First Vogue House - The House of Bab, which is formed of 12 BAME and/ or disabled LGBTQ+ members.
KEY STATS:

- 56.8% of festival audiences are aged 16-35 (more than double the national average), with a 110% increase in young audiences over four years.

- BAME audiences have increased by 36% since 2018, taking the total percentage of audiences who identify as non-white to 24.5%, 50% higher than the national average and 20% higher than the regional average.

- The 2019 festival saw a significant increase in the number of people identifying as trans* (11.4%) and as non-binary (14.1%).

- 71.7% of audiences came from Birmingham postcodes, with 15.3% coming from the wider West Midlands, 11.6% from the rest of the UK, and 1.4% from overseas.

“Let it be writ in the history books that tectonic shifts in bold, queer, spicy, creative black brilliance happened in Brum last night.

-Audience Member at SHOUT Vogue Ball

In Spring 2020, a new Festival Manager was recruited to SHOUT. Rico Johnson-Sinclair has worked in the arts for six years, for organisations such as the BFI, Film Hub Midlands, and Flatpack Festival. He managed the Ageing with Pride campaign run by Birmingham LGBT in 2018, and founded his own LGBTQ+ film festival, named CineQ, which has been running in Birmingham for the past three years. He has also worked within the community to champion the perspectives and experiences of queer, trans and intersex people of colour.
Ageing Better LGBT Hub helps to set up new groups and activities and to develop existing groups, offering practical support, information, networking and access to funding, to help combat isolation in the 50+ age group.

This year, 490 new participants attended 679 individual events. 11 new groups and activities were formed, and two groups successfully applied to the Ageing Better Fund.

We reached out to LGBT+ people across Birmingham, working with Birmingham Neighbourhood Network Schemes: voluntary sector hubs based in 10 constituencies supporting social work teams working with older adults. We plan to develop LGBT+ networks across North Birmingham with Sutton Coldfield NNS, and local group activities with Ladywood NNS.

In April, we were invited to deliver a workshop as part of the international conference: Focus On LGBTIQ+ Seniors, with community and NGO delegates from 18 different countries, many of whom were impressed with our work. We learned that other countries were experiencing similar issues with loneliness and isolation in this community. Subsequently, we were invited onto the steering group of the LGBTQI+ research project, led by Professor Andrew King of the University of Surrey.
Our work with care providers includes meetings with Gracewell of Sutton Coldfield (a private nursing home), which led to a new Pride event attended by staff, residents and senior managers from the Gracewell network, which made ITV news.

"I would like for you to know that Maria helped inspire me to organise our PRIDE party, which was a resounding success. We would very much like to keep working with you to help change perceptions."

- Jody Sedgwick, Gracewell

Here are some of our group successes this year: *Ageing Better LGBT Housing Group*: a forum for older LGBT+ people and housing providers. Members of the group were invited to present at a regional Housing LIN networking day and talk to the staff team of Optivo housing:

"I just wanted to say a massive thank you again for your time yesterday. I spoke with my team after you left and they all enjoyed their time with you and were so grateful for you sharing your stories."

- Optivo Housing

*InteGreat Theatre*: a deaf and hearing people’s musical theatre group, singing with British Sign Language. They were awarded Ageing Better Funds to create a float for 2019’s Birmingham Pride Parade:

"We had an absolute blast. We are still on a bit of a high from it and absolutely want to do that every year, it made such an impact on the people at the parade and we had some many people signing along with us."

- InteGreat Theatre

*Proud Baggies 1968 Club*: an Ageing Better Funded-project of the West Bromwich Albion LGBT+ supporters’ group. The ‘1968 Club’ offers free tickets, travel and refreshments at all home games throughout the season for LGBT+ people over 50 who find themselves disconnected from the community

"We have a unique opportunity to support older LGBT+ people who otherwise would not engage with other LGBT+ people, by offering a safe environment to attend football matches accompanied by members of our group. The 1968 Club is a fitting title since to be eligible you have to have been born before we won our 5th and most memorable FA Cup"

- Proud Baggies 1968
## Financial Statement

Income & Expenditure as of 31st March 2020

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<th>Notes</th>
<th>Unrestricted funds general £</th>
<th>Unrestricted funds designated £</th>
<th>Restricted funds £</th>
<th>Total 2020 £</th>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>26,619</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total income</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>109,150</td>
<td>756,051</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Expenditure on: | | | | | |
| Charitable activities | 8 | 91,873 | - | 676,447 | 768,320 | 837,621 |
| **NET INCOME / (EXPENDITURE)** | | | | 17,277 | 79,604 | 96,881 | (102,773) |

| Transfer between funds | | | | | |
| (10,000) | 10,000 | - | - | - |

| NET MOVEMENT IN FUNDS | | | | | |
| 10,000 | 79,604 | 96,881 | (102,773) |

| Fund balances at 1 April 2019 | 205,778 | 30,000 | 119,511 | 355,289 | 458,062 |
| Fund balances at 31 March 2020 | 213,055 | 40,000 | 199,115 | 452,170 | 355,289 |

The statement of financial activities includes all gains and losses recognised in the year.

All income and expenditure derive from continuing activities.

The statement of financial activities also complies with the requirements for an income and expenditure account under the Companies Act 2006.
The company is entitled to the exemption from the audit requirement contained in section 477 of the Companies Act 2006, for the year ended 31 March 2020. No member of the company has deposited a notice, pursuant to section 476, requiring an audit of these accounts.

The trustees’ responsibilities for ensuring that the charity keeps accounting records which comply with section 386 of the Act and for preparing accounts which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the company as at the end of the financial year and of its incoming resources and application of resources, including its income and expenditure, for the financial year in accordance with the requirements of section 394 and 395 and which otherwise comply with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006 relating to accounts, so far as applicable to the company.

These accounts have been prepared in accordance with the provisions applicable to companies subject to the small companies’ regime.
Birmingham LGBT would like to thank the following funders for their support:

University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust
National Lottery Community Fund (Awards for All & Reaching Communities)
Arts Council England
National Lottery Heritage Fund
Southside Bid
Manchester Airport
Gowling WLG
The Leathersellers’ Company Charitable Fund
Henry Smith Foundation
Comic Relief
Children in Need
Garfield Weston Foundation
Ageing Better in Birmingham (BVSC)

We would also like to thank our partners, stakeholders, volunteers and beneficiaries.
Community Group Profile

RANG South Asian Group

RANG (meaning ‘colour’ in most South Asian languages) is a peer social & support group for South Asian and Middle Eastern men and trans-masculine men only, who may identify as gay or bisexual, or may be grouped as men who have sex with men (MSM). Since Covid-19, the group now meets online via Zoom, every 2nd and 4th Thursday of the month. Every second Friday of the month, RANG group have a joint Zoom with DOSTI group (a support group with a common theme run by Trade Sexual Health Leicester).

RANG is a safe space to talk around themed topics led by the group, and look at the commonalities and differences that culturally exist. It’s also a chance to make new friends, find out about Birmingham LGBT and our support services and get involved in creative activities.

RANG is facilitated by our South Asian & Middle Eastern MSM Sexual Health Outreach Worker. The majority of attendees at this group are affected by isolation, with root causes often being their sexuality and cultural backgrounds.

Over the last 12 months, RANG has seen the following collaborations:

- A visit from DOSTI social support group, hosted by Birmingham LGBT.
- A visit from Birmingham MIND, for a discussion around mental health and well-being.

Monthly topics discussed at the group include: coming out, parents, marriage pressures, masculinity stereotypes, displacement from culture, and more recently discussions around impact of Covid-19, health and wellbeing, a talk about who inspires us, Bollywood cinema and TV, and sexual health.
Christmas Day

Christmas Day 2019 was my first Christmas party spent at the Birmingham LGBT Centre. Our Director and two colleagues, along with myself and a group of volunteers, held a party for people from the LGBT community who would have either celebrated Christmas day alone, or would not have celebrated it at all.

As someone from the LGBT community, I know only too well that you can come from a large family, but at times feel very lonely and isolated. In a lot of instances, our friends become our family for one reason or another, so to be part of such a memorable day had such a positive impact, on not just me but on all the attendees that I spoke with. When I came out over thirty years ago, there was nowhere like the Birmingham LGBT Centre, so to have such a centre that caters for the LGBT community and for me to be part of it is one of my greatest achievements.

Taxis were available and paid for by the Birmingham LGBT Centre for those who were either vulnerable or disabled. They were met by a Birmingham LGBT worker and shown into the Centre. Once inside they were shown where the toilets were, and all the fire exits.

The party was held in the café area of the building, which is located on the ground floor. It was decorated with Christmas decorations and several Christmas trees.

There was a buffet-style spread of both hot and cold foods, to meet different food requirements of the attendees. Tables were laid out in groups of four and six and decorated. I felt arranging the tables in this way would enable the guests to interact with ease. Social interactions can become limited when groups are either to large or too small. For some of the guests, it was their second year of attending the Christmas day party. Many had made new friends the previous year, so for them it has become a great social event and a way to catch up with friends. For others it was their first time. If I saw anyone sitting alone, I would go over to them and strike up a conversation, in order to make them feel included.

It was a great experience to see people of all different faiths, ethnic backgrounds, genders, and some with visible disabilities, coming together and having a great time. Throughout the day there were a host of games, a secret Santa, music, and presents for the guests which were given to them by Santa. There was also the opportunity to have their photograph taken with Santa if they wished. The party finished at approximately 7.30pm. Birmingham LGBT staff, along with the volunteers, helped to clear away both the seating area as well as the kitchen area. It was a great joy to see people working so well together to make this day such a memorable one. Those that I spoke with said how much they had enjoyed the day and that they would definitely be coming to the next one.