



GAY & LESBIAN NETWORK

equality | respect | acceptance
ukulingana | inhlonipho | ukwamukeleka

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Concept Document

Introduction to and Overview of the Gay and Lesbian Network, Pietermaritzburg

1. The Organisation

The Gay and Lesbian Network (GLN) is a registered non-profit organisation based in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal. GLN has been operational since 2003 and in this time has done pioneering work with primarily young, unemployed and marginalized lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people living in and around Pietermaritzburg.

The Network started out in response to the need for LGBTI's to have a safe place where they could meet and socialize, as no such spaces of facilities were available in Pietermaritzburg. From these beginnings it has developed into a fully functional NGO that offers a wide range of programmes and services to the LGBTI community. The organisation also works with the broader community to create a more enabling and welcoming environment, in which LGBTI's can access services and be treated with respect and without discrimination or fear of violence.

The organisation has a staff of 20 and a core of committed volunteers who contribute to every aspect of the Network's programmes including counseling, training, event organizing and general office support. Policies and procedures are in place governing the work and finances of the organisation and it is governed by a Board who meet on a quarterly basis.

Vision: To be a leading LGBTI organisation in Africa promoting equality, human rights and the upliftment of LGBTI people.

Mission: The Gay & Lesbian Network ensures the upliftment and recognition of the LGBTI community through creative programmes for community members, service providers, religious and traditional leaders

Core values: Our core values are equality, respect and acceptance.

Purpose: To work with all communities so that, LGBTI people:

- Are organised
- Are networked with other LGBTI interest groups
- Enjoy improved health and wellbeing in improving their own lives
- Claim their rights
- Create sustainable partnerships, and
- Contribute to the development of a vibrant, supportive and developing LGBTI community.

2. The Beneficiaries

Although GLNs mission is to support to LGBTIs across all age, race and class groupings, black, unemployed/low-income youth (under 30) have organically emerged as the population most interested and in need of the direct services offered. These young people experience discrimination on multiple levels. Not just as a result of poverty, lack of access to education and opportunities but further discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation. GLN has developed a range of support services to assist them develop their own potential, become more aware of their human and legal rights as well as awareness of health issues particularly HIV/AIDS.

3. The Context

As a democracy, constitutional law upholds the rights of the LGBTI community. However, at a micro level, discrimination and oppressive practices still pervades in a highly patriarchal society with marked socio-economic variance among groups. Negative, stereotypical perceptions about the LGBTI community contribute to a culture of intolerance.

By and large, South Africa does not need more or improved policy, but improved implementation and application of these policies and better ways of working and living together. In other words, the main challenges and advocacy issues lie at the structural and cultural levels.

One of the most worrying trends to emerge (or be more widely reported) in the last five years has been the rapid escalation of 'hate crimes', against gender non-conforming people. This trend has been highlighted in a widely publicized recent report written by Human Rights Watch which details the on-going verbal, physical and emotional abuse which lesbians and transgender men experience on a near daily basis.

Numerous cases have been reported where abuse has resulted in rape or murder. According to Human Rights Watch, constant verbal abuse and harassment can leave lesbians and transgender men feeling fearful and cautious. When left unchecked it reinforces prejudices among and within communities. It leads to feelings of shame and negative self-image. It inhibits people's ability to access public spaces and seek redress or justice. If not properly addressed it 'creates a climate of impunity [which allows] violence to escalate from verbal harassment to physical and sexual attacks.'¹

Unfortunately, violence is a widespread trend in South Africa and sexual and gender based violence is deeply rooted in society. This is reinforced as a result of misogynistic social attitudes and patriarchal cultural norms.² It will therefore take much more than just a progressive constitution to change attitudes, not just towards LGBTI's but towards women as a whole. It is within this context that GLN has developed its programme activities.

4. Target Groups

Taking into account the above it is clear that prejudice against gender non-conforming people is deeply embedded and LGBTI's experience discrimination not just in communities but when trying to access a wide range of services. Based on the results of research by GLN with LGBTIs in the communities in which they operate, it has been decided to focus on some key service providers.

¹ *We'll Show you you're a Woman: Violence and Discrimination against Black Lesbians and Transgender Men in South Africa*, Human Rights Watch, 2011.

² Ibid.

Health Practitioners: Research done in Greater Edendale indicated that many LGBTI's interviewed had experienced discrimination when visiting clinics or hospitals. This resulted in poor service or sometimes even refusal of treatment once sexual orientation was discovered. It was also clear that health care workers had a very limited understanding of homosexual sexual practices and thus were ill-equipped to give advice on prevention of HIV or were unwilling to discuss such matters. Such attitudes discourage LGBTI's from visiting clinics, taking HIV tests, getting proper treatment or discussing their sexual relations.

Educational Institutions: Recent research conducted by GLN has indicated that homophobic attitudes are rife in school situations leading to bullying and harassment. These attitudes are not only prevalent amongst learners but are also perpetrated by the educators themselves. According to the Department of Education's Safe, Caring and Friendly Schools guidelines, schools are supposed to be 'safe and protective' places that 'promote equity and equality'.

In most cases pupils struggling with their sexuality have nowhere to turn to and homosexuality is never discussed in classes such as Life Orientation.

Religious and Traditional Leaders: Religious and traditional leaders play an extremely influential role in the communities in which they are based. Their acceptance of LGBTI's and readiness to speak positively about them could dramatically alter attitudes towards homosexuality. Generally this is not the case but GLN has developed contacts which will enable them to dialogue with student theologians and traditional leaders about issues related to sex and sexuality.

Police and the Criminal Justice System: Far from upholding the law and acting as a place where hate crimes or other forms of discrimination can be reported and justice can be sought, LGBTI's often find themselves victims of secondary victimization and discrimination at the hands of the police. Human Rights Watch argues that the impunity with which lesbians and transgender people are attacked indicates a failure of the police to prevent violence against the population in general and these groups in particular.³ These bodies clearly need to be sensitized to the needs of LGBTI's, to better understand the discrimination which they face daily and be prepared to address these crimes in a sensitive and systematic manner.

GLN's programmes will focus on working with the above groups in a variety of ways including training, awareness raising and active advocacy and lobbying. The organisation will work with these groups both at a provincial and local government level and also at a community level.

5. Geographic Focus

Although GLN will work with LGBTI's and stakeholders throughout Pietermaritzburg Midlands, KwaZulu-Natal has been identified as the area where GLN will focus its outreach work. In 2012 with support from the AIDS Foundation South Africa (AFSA), GLN has conducted a survey to determine the needs and challenges faced by the local LGBTI population. The research revealed a strong motivation by local LGBTI's for GLN to have a presence in the area and to provide a range of services. Areas where LGBTI's felt they had least support were from health institutions and the police. A pilot outreach programme was started in the Greater Edendale as a large number of GLN's members were based there. It is a peri-urban settlement 15kms from central Pietermaritzburg with a population of 250, 000 (estimate). It is made up of 19 townships.

³ ibid p46 Human Rights Watch report

From research it has been concluded that Unit BB of Imbali is the most centrally located and easily accessible and office space has been identified in one of the municipal buildings there. 2012 will see the planning for and roll-out of an initial range of services for the local community. After 6 – 8 months these will be reviewed and expanded accordingly. GLN will also work directly with the service providers and groups indicated above with the aim of sharing information and changing attitudes towards the LGBTIs in local communities.

6. Planned Programme

Over the last six months GLN has taken time to look strategically at its work and practice over the last 6 years and as a result has realigned its programme areas.

From this have emerged four key strategic objectives:

1. Creating an Enabling Environment and Advocating for Change

Strategic Objective: Key stakeholders have been made aware of LGBTI rights and issues and are responding appropriately to LGBTI needs.

With regard to Strategic Objective one it is recognised that to be able to create a more enabling environment at a local (community) level it is essential to also work at a provincial/national level.

To achieve this, the Network will engage in the following broad activity areas:

- Work with the Department of Safety and Community Liaison to gain access to police and magistrates who are the perpetrators of secondary discrimination against LGBTIs. Local police stations in communities will be particularly targeted;
- Work with religious leaders (including student theologians) to increase their acceptance and understanding of LGBTIs;
- Increase understanding of LGBTIs and their particular sexual health needs amongst health practitioners' thus improving service at health institutions and ensuring LGBTIs get equal access to information about and treatment of HIV/AIDS. Clinics in and around Greater Edendale will be particularly targeted.
- Work with educators (and learners) to help them address intimidation and discrimination experienced by LGBTI pupils in schools.
- Through identified community leaders we will work with them to communicate a positive message about LGBTIs and to facilitate access to services.

Play a key role in the co-ordination of activities related to both awareness raising of and active redress of hate crimes perpetrated in and around the KwaZulu-Natal province.

2. Outreach Programme – LGBTI Organisation and Community Development

Strategic Objective: The LGBTI community is empowered to take ownership of their rights, engage in self-help and self-development activities and have broader acceptance by the local community for equal and fair treatment.

Much like the Creating an Enabling Environment, the Outreach Programme hosts a number of projects under its umbrella, namely at community level:

- **Psychosocial Support project:** This project is set to provide psychosocial wellbeing services for LGBTIs and the society in which they live in. The services include one-on-one counselling, family support and support groups.
- **Zenzele Youth Project:** This project focuses on personal development and ongoing skill development work with identified LGBTI youth and support groups in the Greater Edendale.
- **The Rainbow Theatre Group:** The aim of having the drama group is to challenge stereotypes, create platforms of engagement and educate through performing arts, singing; dance and active story-telling. The drama group is a member of the South African Community Theatre Association (SANCTA), Performing Arts Network of South Africa (PANSAs) and Assitej South Africa (International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People). The group participated at the SANCTA theatre festival in 2010 and 2011 in Mpumalanga and were placed fourth overall out of 15 theatre groups nationally at the 2011 and 2015 festival.

The aim of this strategy is to achieve sustainable change - the basis of a vibrant and healthy LGBTI community. In addition, the success of this strategy will impact positively on the educational and employment challenges which members of our community are faced with on a day to day basis.

3. Health Programme

Strategic Objective: To increase knowledge about Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights and demand proper, effective and dignified treatment in respect of health with a focus on sexual and reproductive health as well as psycho-social well-being amongst LGBTI people.

The primary activities of Strategic Objective 3 are:

- The focus of the health programme is to provide holistic health support to LGBTI people and create awareness amongst key health stakeholders of LGBTI health issues and needs. The activities under this programme includes:
- **HIV/AIDS services:** In this project we aim to provide support when in terms of HIV/AIDS. We have support groups; the MSM program and HCT services (funded by ICAP); Gender Based Violence support groups and workshops (Sexual awareness and Treatment literacy).
- **Sexual Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR):** The SRHR project goal is to ensure the realisation of sexual and reproductive health rights in marginalised communities and populations in South Africa are advanced.

4. Research

Strategic Objective: To increase knowledge about factors affecting LGBTI people in order to influence GLN programming and external policies and legislation.

Broadly, the anticipated results of this work are:

- Reduced violence and active discrimination against LGBTI people (by themselves and others) and greater acceptance of them as fellow human beings;
- Increased climate of tolerance and acceptance in communities and key institutions, whereby LGBTI's access to services and opportunities are improved;
- Local LGBTI leadership developed resulting in community members taking responsibility for their own programmes and organisation building;
- LGBTI's have a more positive self-image and are more aware of their human and legal rights and thus better able to address their own challenges and problems.
- Better functioning organisation and staff that is able to measure and report on the impact of its work and respond effectively to challenges and situations.

7. Partnerships and agreements

The GLN has over the years formed partnerships with various organisations in order to maximize and strengthening its work and to ensure long term sustainability. The following are partnerships that we have formed and include signing Service Level Agreements and Memorandum of Understanding:

- University of KwaZulu-Natal (MOU signed)
- AMSHER
- National Hate Crime Programme (Consortium of LGBTI organisation to address hate crimes against LGBTIs nationally)
- KZN Consortium (GLN is part of a consortium of 5 organisations in KZN to address socioeconomic rights through funding from the European Union)

8. Awards

The GLN has been awarded the following human rights awards:

- Love to Live Human Rights award in recognition of selfless commitment and sacrifice for human rights in South Africa and abroad – 2014
- Special distinction award from the French National Consultative Commission on Human Rights. The distinction has been granted in recognition of GLNs work and active involvement in supporting the advancement of Human Rights in South Africa, especially with regards to fighting against human rights violations on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender – 2012

7. Conclusion

It is clear that at the current time in South Africa, discrimination and abuse of human rights continues against the LGBTI community. Lack of understanding and cultural and conservative perceptions all result in many LGBTIs living in climate of fear where they are unable to be themselves. It is within this context that the Gay and Lesbian Network operates, undertaking essential activities to address this imbalance. This document aims to provide a broad overview of the work of GLN. Comprehensive programme plans and budgets are available or a full project proposal could be submitted if required. We hope that you will join us in working for rights for LGBTIs in South Africa.

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