

A Long Way From London!

Is the M25 really a dust-cloud, concealing another planet? Some newspapers and TV producers seem to think we are living in a brave new world where everyone can come out safely, everyone has a friendly gay local pub, and everyone works or studies in a homophobia-free environment.

Time for a rural reality check. We've been active in the South West for nearly seven years now, helping to build communities, answering the Helpline, reducing prejudice and fighting social exclusion. So what's the view from here? What are the experiences of local lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and trans people?

Mixed. Definitely mixed. Some of us are living open ordinary lives, living and working amongst our neighbours without prejudice and without fear. Great; that's what we all want; but at present such people seem to be a small minority.

Unlike many other minority communities, most LGBT people can choose to be invisible. The great majority of us do just that. We keep our heads down. Some people prefer not to see gay issues taking a higher public profile, in case higher social visibility makes things more difficult

for them. Others feel that a stronger more visible community will benefit future LGBT people, and the whole community in the long run.

Whether we're Out, or selectively Out, or not Out at all, the majority feel that the South West is neither inclusive nor safe for LGBT people. Many people do experience direct prejudice. A large proportion, we guess about half, of the lesbian gay and trans people in the region have got married. This is truly living in deep camouflage. Our Helpline gets quite a lot of calls from LGBT people who have tried this, and find it isn't working. We get calls from straight partners too.

But the problem we hear most about is sheer loneliness. Across the rural South West from Cape Cornwall to Bath, from Ilfracombe to Christchurch, there are thousands of LGBT people living in isolation, not able to be Out, with no LGBT friends to talk to, and no local scene, or none that they find accessible. This is invisibility in action, and social exclusion at its worst. The communities are working hard to make things better, but we can't do much without more support.

Michael Halls

intercom

Welcome to InterLynx 2004!

Yes we're back, hello again to all our seasoned readers, and to newer members of our audience, get set for the news that matters to you, South West style.

InterLynx is a community newsletter put together by the Intercom Trust for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) people and our friends in the South West. It includes articles that say something about LGBT communities in the South West, be it relating to local/national news, or just useful for those of us living in the region.

We're always on the lookout for articles to put in InterLynx, so if there's something you'd like to tell other LGBTs in the South West about, then get in touch. We'll do our best to get it in the next InterLynx, which we hope will be out in a couple of months.

Enjoy InterLynx 7!

The Editor

New Regulations Protect You At Work

December 1st 2003 was an historic day for LGB communities in the UK. For the first time we were given equal rights within both employment and vocational training.

But what does this mean in practice? The overriding message of the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003 is that an employer can no longer unfairly treat any LGB employee or applicant. This extends to whether an employer thinks someone might be gay or knows someone is gay. It even goes one step further and protects

our friends and families from discrimination if they want to talk about us.

"an employer can no longer unfairly treat any LGB employee or applicant."

[Paul Roberts, The Intercom Trust]

So you would like to hope that everything would be cheery now? Unfortunately, this is not the case!

We still know of employers in our area that are not taking these regulations seriously. We are doing as much as we possibly can to highlight these issues and to let them know that The Intercom Trust is here to provide them with advice and training should they need it.

If you would like to know more about these Regulations and the rights LGB people now have, then check out www.intercomtrust.org.uk/eoto.

Paul Roberts

The lovely Sophia - the agony-free aunt

Sofia responds to more of readers questions and dilemmas:

Sam, Sherborne. I don't see what else you could have done. A Harley just can't hope to share a bed with a Goldwing, it's a question of basic incompatibility. Did you get custody of the adjustable spanner set?

Reuben, Bath. (My, you do get around, don't you.) Thanks for the photos. Frankly, I can see why the new neighbours had a problem. I didn't know the Obscene Publications Act applies to corn-dollies, but we live and learn. (Well, some of us. Have you got rid of those mallards yet?)

Jonathan, Wimborne. Yes, dear, I think you're right to be worried. Puncture marks in the neck are not ordinary love-bites. Try garlic, externally, and see if it happens again. Or just avoid Studland at full moon.

Jasmine and Sarah and Lucy and Sandra and Ellen and Sally, Salcombe. I've read your letter very very carefully four times, darlings, and I can't work out what actually happened to the wing-nuts. Always be careful about sharing body fluids.

Tom, Exmoor. Yep, sounds like love all right. But ask yourself, how many ponies do you really need? Or even want? Countryside alliances are all very well, but... try taking him to a jeweller's or a car showroom, see if he gets the message.

More from Sophia next issue!

Young people stay silent to get their voices heard

DAY OF SILENCE 2004

Tuesday May 11th saw the South West's second Day of Silence. This was a campaign put together by students unions across the South West and Intercom highlighting the prejudice, discrimination and harassment that some young people face when they find themselves growing up LGBT or T.

Participants were given cards to carry around with them on the day explaining their silence. It was up to each person or organisation getting involved exactly how long they remained silent for. Last year saw some colleges and universities making it a whole day event, with others just doing it over a lunch hour. Regardless of how

long people remained silent for, each silence raised awareness of the cause to stamp out homophobic & transphobic bullying.

The Day of Silence drew inspiration from the USA where it has been running since 1997. This year an estimated 300,000 students took part. In the UK, we rallied the support of colleges and universities to take part. The event gained modest support this year and in 2005 we hope to extend the event to all youth led organisations. If you did not take part in the event this year but would like to get involved in future then please get in touch.

Paul Roberts

**GET INVOLVED next year by contacting Paul Roberts
01392 20 10 12 or Paul@intercomtrust.org.uk**

FOCUS ON: LGBT Youth Groups

CORNWALL: Bodmin Legacy (07800 610633)

DEVON: Exeter X-plore (07867 570944), Plymouth OUT (07791 652486), Barnstaple Respect (07929 829578).

DORSET: Bournemouth and Weymouth Space (07973 405280), Bridport BYG (07796 517793)

SOMERSET: Somerset Gay Health for groups in Wells, Taunton and Frome (01823 327076).

Most of these groups are open to those aged 14 to 25, but contact the groups themselves for more information. If you know of any other youth groups for LGBTs not listed here then please contact us and let us know.

In memoriam: Jonathan Hindley... 'Jonno'

Nigel Stuart North pays tribute to a dear friend and founder of Intercom's Rainbow Café who recently passed away.

"Jonno was a remarkable, individual and charismatic guy. He amazed everyone who knew him with his creativity, sense of fun and spirituality. A craftsman with wood and sculpture, he made ideas happen such as the Rainbow Café, and his desire to own a meadow was almost complete. Jonno's sharp intelligence was reflected in his published political work, 'How to Run Your Own Country', which is widely read across the world on his website. Jonno was honest, kind and funny; he enthused about all of his projects and his many friends loved him.

"We shall miss his twinkling blue eyes and broad open smile. We shall miss everything about Jonno because he enriched so many lives and contributed so much. Thank you Jonno, we will always remember you."

Jonno died peacefully at home during the early hours of Tuesday 16th March after suffering acute heart failure.

Government Office supporting LGBT communities

Until the end of June this year, the Government Office of the South West (GOSW) will be funding Intercom's Community Resources Project. This project is about finding out what's out there for LGBT people in the South West, what community groups exist, what services they provide, and what needs these groups may have.

David Watson will be carrying out this project on behalf of Intercom, with the help of the Intercom Team. They will be contacting LGBT community groups over the next 2 months and asking for their help in putting together a complete picture of the groups in the area. This will enable Intercom to provide better information to people calling our helpline so more people will be able to join local community groups in their area. Meeting up with LGBT community groups will also help Intercom to paint a more accurate picture of the needs of LGBT communities in the South West in our partnership meetings (e.g. local government). We don't get to chat to local groups as much as we'd like so this is a perfect opportunity to make sure we're speaking up on the

right issues.

At the end of June the project team will write a report on what services are being provided, where and who for. It will also talk about where services are not being provided, or are in danger of disappearing, due to a lack of funding for example. It will not reveal any confidential information.

If you work with a local LGBT community group in the South West then we'd like to hear from you! Please contact David on 01392 678744 or email David@intercomtrust.org.uk to help us with our project. You can either talk to David over the phone or he will come to your group in person.

David Watson

Do you work with an LGBT group in the South West?

If the answer is yes then please contact David on 01392 678744 to take part in the project - but more importantly, to make sure your group is included in our Helpline listings.

Helpline Volunteers WANTED!

Are you a good listener, gay friendly and able to offer us 4 hours a month of your time?

YES? Then contact Michael on 01392 201015 to join the Helpline team.

In memoriam: Thom Gunn

As we go to press, we learn with sadness that the outstanding poet Thom Gunn has died at the age of 74. We send our condolences to his partner of 52 years, Mike Kitay. Gunn's poetry was at the same time passionate and formal, sensual, austere and fastidious. He was in a class of his own.

The Night Piece

The fog drifts slowly down the hill
And as I mount gets thicker still,
Closes me in, makes me its own
Like bedclothes on the paving stone.

Here are the last few streets to climb,
Galleries, run through veins of time,
Almost familiar, where I creep
Toward sleep like fog, through fog like sleep.

[© Thom Gunn and Faber & Faber]

Devon County Council listens to LGBT employees

In one of the first of such moves nationally, let alone in the South West, Devon County Council (DCC) recently undertook a consultation exercise with its LGBT employees to find out what they thought of living in Devon, receiving services from the Council and working for DCC as an employer.

Carried out from November to December 2003 with Intercom's support, the exercise gave employees the chance to have their say anonymously on just about anything to do with the County Council's operations. Having employed an LGBT consultant especially to facilitate the exercise, the Council got some blunt feedback, both positive and negative.

Speaking to Intercom, Angela Welch, of the Chief Executive's Directorate, said, "This was a significant step by DCC to take on board the opinions of employees that may have previously felt unable to speak openly about their concerns. Learning from what its LGBT employees have to say will not only mean LGBT employees move closer to equality within the organisation, but will also give the Council an idea as to where it can make changes for the better in other important areas of activity. Not least in providing services and setting a good example in the region on LGBT equality."

The project report can be viewed online at www.devon.gov.uk/diversity by following the 'celebrating diversity' then 'groups and projects' path.

David Watson

The Criminal Justice System - what's it there for?

Intercom held two community open meetings in March, one in Helston and one in Exeter, to get a sense of how LGBT people felt about the criminal justice system (CJS). Thanks to everyone involved, including the Local Criminal Justice Board for Devon & Cornwall who had the original idea and paid the costs.

People told us that the CJS needs to work harder to tell people what it's doing. There were serious doubts about the recruitment and attitudes of magistrates, and about prejudice in the jury system. The police came out well on effort and community outreach with more than half of people saying that they'd heard the police are trying to provide a fair and non-discriminatory service. People felt that this kind of consultation should happen more often, and try to cover all of the South West.

For more details keep an eye on our website. We'll put a fuller report online soon.

Waving the FFLAG at the Tory Pink Summit

On 29th March the Conservative Party held an LGB Youth Summit at the Houses of Parliament. Designed to open a dialogue between the Tories and the LGB community, the Shadow Minister for Young People, Charles Hendry MP remarked that, "it was extremely helpful to hear first hand the experiences of so many people about issues which I think politicians have tended to avoid in the past."

The event was attended by young people and their representatives from across the UK, including Paul Roberts (Intercom's Joint Action Against Homophobic Bullying) and Jenny Broughton (Families & Friends of Lesbians & Gays-FFLAG). Jenny, speaking to Tories at the event said that she was glad to be there but that LGBs, "will judge you not on your words, but on your voting record in Parliament [and] how you influence your councillors and party members at local and devolved government level."

FOCUS ON: Trans group Western Boys in Taunton

Western Boys is a support and social group which aims to meet the needs of FTM (female to male) transsexuals in South West England. The group was founded in Autumn 2002 by Jon, Steve, Dan and George, who felt that all the action was London based and something was badly needed in the South West.

With meetings on the third Friday of the month in central Taunton, themes have included families and relationships, sex and pizza, body language, and the legal situation before the Gender Recognition Bill. From 18th - 20th June we will be holding the 1st Western Boys Summer Solstice Camp near Wellington. This will be for FTMs and their invited partners, friends, and families.

Our meetings are largely for FTMs so that each person can feel comfortable discussing subjects that may be sen-



sitive, where non-FTMs may not empathise. Some mixed meetings with trans women are held, as well as meetings where partners and friends are invited, such as ones relating to clothes so we may take advantage of the feminine eye!

We have contact with a number of groups for the benefit of our members, including the Gender Clinic at the Bristol Royal Infirmary. These contacts help to raise awareness of the needs of transmen in terms of acceptance, treatment and overall medical support.

If you are a transman, or are FTM identified, and still exploring the way forward then we would be pleased to hear from you. We may be contacted on 07811 814302 or by email at info@westernboys.co.uk.

By Dan Hooper

Contacting Intercom

The Intercom Trust is an LGBT voluntary community organisation working in these areas: helpline and advocacy; community building and outreach; community safety; strategic partnerships and consultancy; young people; and equal opportunities training.

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◆ **If you would like to contribute an article or news to InterLynx then please get in touch.**

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