

From a standing start

First Annual Report of the Trustees
Year Ending 8 September 1998

The beginnings

The intercom Trust was born on 8 August 1997, though it took the Founders another week to find a name for it, and five weeks to draw up the Constitution. The Constitution was signed on 9 September 1997, which is accordingly the beginning of the Trust's legal existence, and the beginning of our financial year.

The Founders

The seven founders were Jim Straker, Alan Munnik, Adrian May, Nigel Matthews, Richard Leech, David Evans and Michael Halls. Their backgrounds included education, agriculture, health care, the Civil Service, academic history, librarianship, commerce, and social work. Some were employed, others not. All they had in common was that they lived in the South West, they were all experienced in voluntary work, and they were all gay.

They also all happened to be male. This was an accident, but obviously a wrong thing, and it caused us great concern from the start. Women are now playing a central role in the Trust, and that is the very best single development we've seen since August 1997. In particular, we owe a great deal to Delia, a dedicated and valued colleague as Trustee during the first nine crucial months, and to Penny and Gill, now recently appointed as Women's Officers.

Aims and Objectives

In the summer of 1997, the national media seemed to be telling us that Britain had entered a new era of tolerance, where prejudice hardly dared raise its ugly voice. It may have looked that way to some journalists living in London, or Manchester or Glasgow. But the Founders knew from their work in the voluntary sector that for many LGB people living—or worse still, growing up—in (say) Newton Abbot or Ilfracombe, North Tawton or Doddiscombsleigh, these journalists might as well be on another planet. In this rural and conservative region, with a good deal of residual homophobia, isolated gay people have no support network, and no reliable access to accurate and unprejudiced information about human sexuality. We knew that the Gay and Lesbian Switchboard had found it difficult even to publicise the existence of their helpline; and no-one can ring a helpline if they don't even know that it exists. So where can people turn for information? Schools? Hardly. Doctors? Perhaps—but it is so important not to have to start off by thinking of your sexuality as some kind of disease! Libraries, then? Well, perhaps... but what exactly do you say to the friendly helpers in your local travelling library van when Mrs Vosper, who has hearing like a NATO defence radar, is picking through the Barbara Cartlands two feet away?

The founders talked about isolation, homophobia, social exclusion, fear, and public ignorance about human sexuality... Above all we wanted to see the end of homophobic violence, self-harm, and suicide. As the twenty-first century approaches, surely the West Country ought to become a place where gay people of all ages and genders can live and work amongst their neighbours without prejudice, and without fear?

We agreed we could see four ways towards this ideal.

1. Community-building.

Perhaps LGB people in this rural area could build up their own large, inclusive, LGB community, linked by a newsletter and social events. In particular, such a community could offer resources to help those people who are suffering from isolation, rejection, violence, or abuse.

2. Liaison between the agencies.

There should be some kind of forum where all the gay and other agencies could meet. A broadly-based, well-informed forum of this kind could argue our community interests clearly and audibly to Health Authorities, Social Services, police, education, housing, and so on.

3. Public Education.

There just has to be a better public understanding of human sexuality! That meant public-service education of some kind.

Community-building, liaison, public education. The new project could try to do these three things. But there was a fourth thing about which the founders felt equally strongly.

4. Supporting the HIV/AIDS agencies in the region.

We all owe so much to AIDSline, DAA, Panderic, Plymouth Eddystone Group, Body Positive Somerset, GU clinic staff, the Cornwall AIDS Council, and many other agencies. Now by their nature these are not exclusively LGB agencies; but a gay community group can support and perhaps enhance their work. Right, we said: if the HIV agencies will permit it, Intercom will do exactly that.

We decided on the shape of the new project (I'll come to that below), wrote the Deed of Trust, collected what we could afford to set up the Trust Fund (we opened the bank account with a massive £20!), and elected four Trustees. By then our numbers had increased: we had welcomed Alan Crabbe, of the North & East Devon Health Authority, and Delia, our first woman Member.

The Launch

Then we set about asking for input and support, and simply spreading the word that we existed. Our first ports of call-I remember this vividly-were the Gay & Lesbian Switchboard (Southwest) and AIDSline. It is a source of special pleasure to all concerned that intercom's relations with these two vitally important, well-established agencies have flourished.

We applied for a start-up grant from the National Lottery Charities Board. We simply couldn't believe that we got it. This was such a gesture of confidence! It meant more to us than anyone could imagine. At the end of April, the Trust borrowed a minibus from the Orchard Theatre Company and had a grand public launch on Plymouth Hoe. We'd like to thank everyone who worked for that event, and everyone who turned up to support it. There was an interview on Radio Devon, where we heard Adrian beautifully squelch a man who thought this was an indefensible way to use Lottery money, and there was coverage on other radio stations and in local papers, all positive and supportive. Westcountry Live spent an

hour filming the launch ceremony at Smeaton's Tower and on Tinside... then dropped it from the schedule at the last minute to make room for a piece about a dog who wore shoes.

You can't win them all.

Having launched our gay pink streamered rainbow flagged intercom minibus, we took it on a four day, nine hundred mile tour of Cornwall, Devon, Somerset and Dorset. Public libraries, Citizen's Advice Bureaux, Volunteer Bureaux and indeed the general public welcomed us minibus, posters, rainbow flags, fliers and all.

After the Launch

Since then we have been working with our supporters, developing our good relations with other agencies, and building up our knowledge of the available resources for information, advice and support. We've done LGB awareness work in "J" Division of the Police Force, and are looking forward to future similar engagements. We've co-trained youth and social workers on human sexuality, and are looking forward to other similar engagements. We've supported Jon Hindley's new project, the Saturday Gay Café in Exeter Central Library, and we will actively support the new Women's Night which Penny and Gill are setting up, with Allison and Carl here at Liberty's on Mondays.

We've produced four issues of the Newsletter. We've sent out over seven hundred letters and over eighty press releases. Between us we've made something around a thousand 'phone calls.

All this has been done by volunteers working in their own time and using their own homes and telephones: the Trust has no paid staff, and no office. And we're all learning all this as we go. No way can we pretend we've been getting everything right but we are learning, all the time. We think we're getting there.

The shape of intercom

The Trustees have overall responsibility for everything the Trust does. They have to make all the necessary policy decisions, within the limits laid down in the Constitution. They have to make sure the Trust obeys its own Constitution, does not break the law, produces financial accounts every year, and never, ever, gets into debt. Lesbian gay / bisexual Trustees have a built in majority vote on the Board.

Members of the Trust are LGB people who want to support the Trust's work, get the Newsletter, come to social events, and have a vote at General Meetings like this one.

Friends of the Trust are people who aren't LGB, but who still wish to support the Trust's work, get the Newsletter, and come to social events. Under the original Constitution Friends don't have a vote but we will come to that later in this Annual General Meeting.

Members and Friends, the Newsletter, personal support, information and advice: this community building activity is the centre round which the whole Trust revolves. We call this project Lynx SouthWest.

The Forum that the Founders contemplated is called the Executive Council. On the Council, members of intercom work together with representatives from other agencies, discussing LGB needs, and setting up new initiatives. If any Member or Friend would like to apply for a seat on the Council, please let Penny know.

Vacancies do occur, and we are always looking for a broad spectrum of people to fill them.

As you'll see from the little chart, the Council and the Lynx SouthWest project work together closely. The Newsletter is called InterLynx because it's written for Members and Friends, who've joined through the Lynx SouthWest project, but it also carries news about what the Council, and the Intercom Trust as a whole, is doing.

Membership

Membership has grown steadily, in spite of the fact that we have not yet had a serious membership drive. At the date of this report we have fifty four Ordinary Members (35 men, 19 women), four Friends (all women), and three Associate Members (two men, one woman). We have one Honorary Member. The post of Patron of the Trust is vacant.

Trustees

The first four Trustees, elected by the founders, were Delia Aslan, Jim Straker, Adrian May, and Michael Halls. In May 1998 we had sadly to say goodbye to Delia, who decided to move on. At the date of this report the Trustees are Adrian, Jim and Michael. Since the end of the financial year, the Board of Trustees has changed again, as you can see below.

Finances

The Trust ended the year with net cash assets of £228. If you think of this as four per cent of our total income for the year, it doesn't look so great. If you think of it as being eleven times the little Trust Fund that we began with, it looks marvellous. And we believe that the £5,400 we have spent on equipment, postage and phone calls, publicity, membership services, and liaison with other agencies, has been well spent.

Capital equipment we've acquired includes the computer and printer, display boards and flip-chart easel, and, of course, our rainbow flags.

Volunteers

I want to point to one particular line 'm these accounts. Volunteers have redonated more than two hundred pounds of their out-of-pocket expenses to the Trust. If they had not done that—if they had claimed all they were entitled to claim—we would have ended the year almost as badly off as we were when we first opened the Trust's bank account. I want to thank all our existing volunteers very warmly for all their time, energy, and enthusiasm, and for their financial sacrifices. The Trustees think it is a primary responsibility to get the finances on a sounder footing, so that our volunteers can be confident that the Trust does not depend for its survival on this particular kind of generosity.

Now it's time for a personal apology. I am personally aware that we have failed to follow up properly some eager and supportive people who have asked to be volunteers for the Trust. We have not been efficient—we have not followed up—in short, we haven't treated you as you deserved. I'm afraid this is my fault. Penny and Gill are now our Volunteer Co-Ordinators, and they will do a far better job of it than I have.

Thanks

We would like to record our very deep gratitude to many individuals and agencies across the region, for the use of their resources, for advice and information, and above all for encouragement and general support. We immediately think of the Exeter Council for Voluntary Service, the National Lottery Charities Board, Liberty's in Exeter, In Other Words Ltd in Plymouth, AIDSline, Mike Jarman at the South and West Devon Health Authority, Jonno Madeley at the Youth Enquiry Service in Plymouth, the North Devon Sh-OUT! Group, the Orchard Theatre Company in Barnstaple (who lent us their minibus for our launch tour), the Plymouth Eddystone Group, Plymouth Organisation Of Lesbians, Virginia House, Peer Positivity in Ivybridge, Malcolm Lidbury in Camborne, Youthwize in Okehampton and Tavistock, the Gay Outdoor Club, Stonewall, Plymouth City Council and Exeter City Council, many other people and agencies, and last but by no means least, those journalists and editors across the region who have written about the Trust so responsibly and supportively.

But above all the Trustees would like to thank, on behalf of the Founders, you—the Trust's Members and Friends, Volunteers and would-be Volunteers, and other supporters. In a real sense, it's your Trust. We have been trying to hatch a very large egg in a very small and cramped nest. Our operations have been run on good will, sweat and patience, coffee, crossed fingers and a very thin shoe-string indeed. It's been your patience and your good will, your gifts and subscriptions, that have enabled the new project to get this far. Thank you. Please go on supporting it.

The Future

The Trustees' own targets for the next year are:

- To use our volunteers better.
- To set up better liaison with and between the other gay groups in the region.
- To work more and more closely with the other, non-LGB, agencies that affect our lives.
- To set up more social events for Members and Friends.
- To extend our victim-support resources.
- To concentrate on LGB awareness in health, education and law and order.

All of these things depend on our acquiring a proper office and a telephone line, and giving the Trust firm financial security. And this, in turn, depends on the Trust's becoming, at last, a registered charity.

That is the next step into the future. With your help, we'll take it.

Michael Halls
Chair

For the Board of Trustees:

Gill Vooght
Jim Straker
Penny Lowery
Rob Hewitt
Michael Halls

Presented to the Annual General Meeting
28 November 1998

ACCOUNTS, 1997 – 1998 (Year One)

INCOME

001 Subscriptions	209.00
002 Donations	118.25
003 Collecting Tins	118.43
004 Grants	4,700.00
005 Other Fund-Raising	53.70
006 Professional Fees	5.00
007 Club Door Charges	62.50
008 Bank Interest	4.95
015 Other Credits	142.30
414 Volunteer Expenses Redonated	202.89

EXPENDITURE

101 Postage	146.46
102 Stationery	101.07
103 Telephone	116.27
104 P.O. Box	52.00
105 Photocopying	82.10
107 PR & Advertising	14.07
108 Petrol expenses	398.94
109 Food & Accommodation	0.55
110 Rail & Bus Fares	13.70
111 Car Park Fees	48.80
112 Childcare costs	15.50
121 Periodicals	1.99
125 Roadshow items	111.05
131 Hire of Rooms	116.50
132 Car & Van Hire	80.00
140 Gifts	9.50
145 Entertainment	12.50
150 Misc. Office Expenses	66.44
190 Other Expenditure	154.29
211 Computer & Peripherals	2,643.75
220 Training Equipment	1,082.33
230 Misc. Office Equipment	16.91
311 Insurance	82.16
314 Legal Fees	0.50
315 Affiliation Fees	21.00

TOTAL INCOME 1997-1998

5,617.02

TOTAL EXPENDITURE 1997-1998

5,388.38

**SURPLUS OF INCOME OVER
EXPENDITURE**

228.64

CASH & BANK RECONCILIATION

Cash in Hand:	37.24
Bank Account at 1 September 1998	215.48
Credit in Hand / lodged	10.00
Less Cheques lodged	-13.35
Cash Assets c/d:	249.37
Less invoice received & c/d	-20.73
Net Assets at 8 September 1998	228.64