Our Twentieth Year

Yes! In August 2017 Intercom will be celebrating our 20th birthday.

And that’s not all there is to celebrate... read on!

What we’ve been up to...

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Intercom’s New Website

It was looking tired, wasn’t it! Well, the old site’s been retired now, to a comfortable LGBT+-friendly home for websites of the past. As of 1 September Intercom has a bran-new bright and shiny website, completely redesigned. Thanks to Tom at Pure Glow Media in Bournemouth, and Paul, and everyone else who’s helped!

The new site has up-to-date news stories on the front page, and also takes our Twitter feeds. The old Collective website, where so many people went for news and to find their local groups and activities, is now incorporated into the new site, under the “Directory” tab.

And our popular Resources pages (surveys, reports etc.) is still there of course. Have a browse!

www.intercomtrust.org.uk
New office in Exeter

Goodbye... after sixteen years... to the familiar old quirky building down by the river.

We’ll miss you! (but we shan’t miss the 52 stairs, oh no! Nor the traffic noises).

But we had no choice - we had to move. The City Council granted planning permission for massive redevelopment just a few metres away from our Helpline Room and our other quiet support areas. We could never have kept our services going through all the noise of demolition, pile-driving and construction.

Almost everything in Exeter is open plan, which is no good for our work. After searching for months, we were lucky to find somewhere appropriate, secure, really pleasant, and affordable, in a leafy suburb.

Our new premises have a reception area, a meeting-room, a good quiet Helpline Office, a counselling room on the ground floor, and a shared office for Michael, Andy and Richard. We’re still unpacking as we write this, but we’re in! — and our services are up and running.

Special thanks to Andy, who did so much of the work and made the move go more smoothly than it might have done!

Mental Health Conference 21 July, 2016

Thanks to our Comic Relief funding, and support in kind from Somerset County Council, we were able to put on an all-day conference in County Hall in Taunton for professionals involved in delivering mental healthcare across the South West — both practitioners and commissioners. Our warmest thanks to Tom Rutland at Somerset County Council, and to all others involved. There were sixty attenders from across the South West, and their post-conference feedback has been amazingly encouraging.

For a full conference report, see our resources page at www.intercomtrust.org.uk/resources.

A Quality Charter for Mental Healthcare

Our Autumn Challenge to the NHS

It’s the final piece in the Strategic Mental Health Project jigsaw that we’ve developed with our strategic Comic Relief funding. We’re asking all NHS mental health providers to sign up to our simple Charter commitment:

Aiming for Excellence in mental healthcare

No barriers!
We are proud to be Aiming for Excellence in respect of providing appropriately-skilled mental healthcare for LGB, Trans and Non-Binary people.

Signed ... on behalf of The Intercom Trust
Signed ... on behalf of

If you’d like to help us promote this charter by lobbying or campaigning for it in your own NHS locality, give Andy a shout on 01392 201012.

Your feedback! about the NHS and social care

We’ve set up a special confidential feedback form for LGBT+ people to report our thoughts — positive or negative — about our own experiences of the full range of NHS and social care services. The form is at www.tinyurl.com/lgbthealthsw. Give it a whirl!

Mental health video

Best thanks to SPACE LGBTQ Youth Project in Dorset, Dorset MindOut, and Silver Moments, for having made a really stunningly fine video for us about LGBT+ mental health needs. Local people from the South West talk about their experiences of using NHS and social care services for young people and for adults. Thanks to them for making the video, and to the Big Lottery Fund (Awards for All) for making it possible.

The big lesson we learned from the people who made this video is that mental health workers want training on LGBT+ issues that both meets their needs and properly respects their professionalism. We took all this into account when writing our online training course (see the facing page)

The video is at tinyurl.com/mhmatterslgbt.
Online training project
We’ve written and launched an online training package for mental health workers.
You can get there through the Training tab on our new website. Or you can go directly to it at www.lgbthealthmatters.org.uk.

Exciting challenge
We’ve been providing face-to-face training (schools, police, local government, NHS, CPS, commercial firms, and many others!) ever since 1999, but this is the first time we’ve tried our hands at setting out an online training package.

So why do it now?
We’ve had increasing numbers of calls from mental health professionals — counsellors, psychologists, school support-workers, etc. — saying that they really don’t feel they’ve been adequately trained in LGBT+ issues, not even in the use of appropriate language.

Also, we hear from people who’ve had unhelpful or negative encounters with generic mental healthcare services. In our Big Community Survey two years ago, two-thirds of those respondents who’d used mental healthcare services in the previous two years were dissatisfied with the level of understanding of the LGBT+ issues that were relevant to them.

For example, people who’ve used generic mental healthcare have told us, in the last three years:

- “I was assigned to a counsellor who immediately terminated the session when I told her that I was gay.”

- “Never knowing how people are reading me, forever being misgendered... (the list goes on) this causes a lot of anxiety and does affect my mental health / depression.”

- “If I am around someone who doesn’t know I’m a lesbian, and they begin to say things that may be unintentionally offensive, it stops you wanting to come out to them, and just makes things difficult.”

This sort of thing shouldn’t be happening, and our contacts in the mental health services are amongst the first people to say so. (And thanks to our Comic Relief funded Strategic Mental Health Project, we’re having a lot of contact with mental health professionals nowadays.)

So we wondered, “what can Intercom do to help?”

What we did to help
We started by gathering all the data we could from LGBT+ people who had mental health issues, especially those who had experiences (good or... not so good) of generic mental healthcare.

We listened to our colleagues, friends and supporters who are themselves counsellors. We consulted our own Help Support and Advocacy team of support-workers.

And we learned a lot from our new friends and colleagues in the Department of Clinical Psychology at Plymouth University.

With help and input from all these, we sat down and designed, and wrote, the online training-package, and found a website-designer who understood the sort of site we wanted. Many thanks to Kourosh at Pushing Panda webdesign!

The new site
LGBT Health Matters is aimed at mental health professionals in the NHS and in the rest of the publicly-funded MH sector. For them the course is free — it’s Intercom’s present to our public-sector-funded colleagues.

Anyone else can use it, but we ask other people who sign up — private practice counsellors, for instance — to let us know and ask us to invoice them £50.

How did we fund it?
We weren’t funded externally for this project, so the team-member who was eager to lead on this wrote the package in unpaid volunteer time. We paid the costs of the website-design out of the small unrestricted income we receive each year from training fees.

What’s in the course?
The course consists of 21 units in 4 modules. It takes about four hours to complete, but take it at your own pace. Users have suggested that it’s a good idea to take a break before Module 3 and then again before Module 4. You can see the entire course contents as soon as you’ve logged in and gone to the Courses page.

The course focuses on being positive, and directly useful to professionals. We’ve already had very encouraging feedback from its first users.
Dwayne writes, from Salisbury:

All’s well in sunny Salisbury, and I’m glad to say that awareness of the Help Support and Advocacy project is spreading fast among people who need to get in touch. Calls and meetings have gone up nearly eightfold since the same period last year; and we’re about to embark on a major sykehlder project with Wiltshire Council.

But there’s always room for more! If you know anyone in Swindon or Wiltshire who’s LGBT+ and has been affected by prejudice or discrimination or social isolation, or by crime or harassment, or are having family or relationship problems, just give them our information and helpline number, 0800 612 3010.

Debbie writes, from Devonport:

Settling in nicely to the new office! Luckily I knew Plymouth well before I moved to Intercom in June, so it didn’t take too long to find my feet!

Partnership work across the area is beginning to take shape: peer-support groups for LGBT+ mental health, third party hate crime reporting and gender identity family days are just some of the projects currently being launched.

I see that calls from Plymouth people have gone up by a factor of three compared with last year, and the figure’s still rising. It makes such a difference having a local office and a local worker!

Steve writes, from Redruth:

Lots going on in Cornwall, as ever. Cornwall Council is way ahead of the competition when it comes to assessing LGBT+ people’s needs, and making sure there’s professional community-competent service-provision. We’ve been holding great Trans family events in partnership with YAY, FFLAG and Cornwall College. Call volumes were already high, but they’ve gone up another 25% year on year, and my word, the demand continues to increase.

Jacqui writes, from Bournemouth:

More and more calls are coming in from rural Dorset, which is really important and very good news, since it’s so difficult to spread awareness of our help Support and Advocacy service in rural areas. Call-numbers have doubled since the same period last year.

I’m very pleased to say we’re also in a very productive strategic relationship with Dorset Police, around community engagement and consultation.

Devon County and Torbay

Vickie and Tina write, from Exeter:

Busier than ever, that’s us!

Calls from Devon County have gone up massively; we have two-and-a-half times as much work as we had a year ago. The figure for Torbay has also gone up dramatically — one-and-a-half times as much as a year ago. A good deal of our work nowadays is with young people who are living with gender conflict, and that of course means their families and schools and school support staff as well.

Help Support and Advocacy

Looking at the service as a whole, calls and meetings have gone up by nearly 50% year on year. Forty per cent of our service-users are bringing us mental health problems, over a third are suffering from social isolation, and nearly a third have been affected by crime or discrimination (9% by both).

Why the increase? It seems that many people are deciding they’ve lived too long with prejudice, discrimination, domestic abuse, etc., and they feel that with current legislative protections they simply don’t have to go on putting up with it; so they look for a suitable community-led source of support or advocacy with a sound track-record.

Statistics on this page compare our figures for March - August 2016 with those for March - August 2015.
Michael ... is our Executive Director, and was one of the people who originally set Intercom up. He is in overall charge of operations, does all the statistics, the fundraising, the compliance stuff, writes the reports for our funders, does the Trust’s partnership work with our public-sector stakeholders, and manages the Trust’s finances and budgets from day to day on behalf of the Trustees.

Richard ... is our new Strategic Planning Manager, thanks to a development grant from the Cabinet Office’s Local Sustainability Fund. This fund is a Central Government initiative to help make charities that provide critical help for disadvantaged people to become more secure and sustainable into the future.

It never ceases to amaze me, the courage and inner strength of helpline callers. Some have coped for many years with harassment and discrimination and others go through great turmoil in order to live their life as themselves.

It’s very rewarding to be a part of a team that supports LGBT+ people living in the South West.

Andy ... is the Trust’s Deputy Director, and Head of the Help Support and Advocacy Service. He’s been with Intercom since 2006. As well as managing our Help Support and Advocacy service, Andy is running our Strategic Mental Health Project (funded by Comic Relief).

He leads on our new partnership with Plymouth University Department of Clinical Psychology (see page 6). Andy says, “These are exciting times for us here at Intercom! We are always looking for ways to improve the services we can offer to our clients. And we have some innovative projects in the pipeline, so keep an eye on our new website for details!”

Paul ... Everybody who calls our main office line in Exeter knows our Paul. He’s our Office Manager, and he looks after the day-to-day administration of the Trust, keeps the website and social media up to date, does the bookkeeping, manages room and parade flag bookings, keeps track of who’s going to be at what Prides and other events, reminds Michael of all the things at the top of his to-do list, deals with all the rent and utilities paperwork for the five offices, and... yes, you’ve guessed it, it’s Paul who keeps the whole organisation functioning from day to day.

Max writes...
The helpline is busier than I’ve ever known it, taking several thousand calls a year from our core localities (see the facing page) and also a few occasional calls from Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset, Bath, Gloucestershire... and sometimes further afield, too.

Helpline calls can be very long, and sometimes there’s hardly time to draw breath between them. About half our service-users prefer to stick to using the helpline for phone support, and of course many others use the helpline as well as getting face-to-face support from their local worker.

It never ceases to amaze me, the courage and inner strength of helpline callers. Some have coped for many years with harassment and discrimination and others go through great turmoil in order to live their life as themselves.

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Future Planning

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Richard is writing and managing our new Strategic and Operational Plans, our conversion of Intercom to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, and, most important of all, our Fair Access Project to develop stronger and fairer funding relationships with the public and other sectors in the South West. (See page 7.)

Richard and Michael work closely with Intercom’s Advisor; the national LGBT Consortium, and with our Business Partner; the legal team at Stephens Scown.

The Helpline: 0800 612 3010

The Core Team
New partnership with Plymouth University’s Department of Clinical Psychology

This is a very exciting and welcome development. In July, at our Mental Health Conference (see page 2), Professor Jacqui Stedmon and her students Nikki Wheeler and Gemma Budge gave a splendid presentation. Later, Nikki and Gemma gave two outstanding workshops together, exploring how clinical psychology might support stakeholders and clients from the LGBT+ communities. Nikki is currently on official placement with Intercom, and Gemma will be on placement with us in the new academic year. We thank Jacqui, Nikki and Gemma and all your colleagues for engaging with us, and sharing your skills.

Nikki writes:
“I’m a third year Trainee Clinical Psychologist from Plymouth University. As part of an innovative inter-professional learning strand at my university, I am one of the first trainees to have a training placement with a community service outside the NHS.

I was overjoyed when I discovered Intercom nearly 2.5 years ago at the start of my doctoral research. My research involves exploring the experiences of young people who have a trans sibling. It is supported by the Gender Identity Development Service at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust.

Intercom are pioneering the idea of having clinical psychology as part of a community service provision by having trainees on placement, and I think trainees have lots of skills we can bring to complement Intercom’s team. In conjunction with our university supervisor, Dr Annie Mitchell, and Andy at Intercom we’ve been writing some articles for our professional magazine, Clinical Psychology Forum, about these community psychology placements, and about our conference presentation — which.

I have really enjoyed co-working with Intercom’s support-workers and learning more about the mental health needs amongst the LGBT+ communities, and I have completed Intercom’s fabulous on-line training resource for NHS professionals (I thoroughly recommend this).

Finally, as part of my placement, I am hoping to meet with people who have used Intercom’s services to produce some anonymous case studies of people’s experiences, so if you are willing to share your experience, please get in touch with me (ClinPsych@intercomtrust.org.uk) or call 01392 678744.

Here’s to Intercom’s growing relationship with the Plymouth Doctorate in Clinical Psychology Programme, and to their continued co-working in the future for the benefit of clients, trainees’ learning, Intercom staff, and Intercom itself as an organisation!”

Breaking news: new extended partnership with GIDS

In another very exciting new development, Intercom and GIDS, the young people’s gender-identity service, are planning to work more closely together than ever.

We’ve been working together on family days and conferences, and on supporting our shared service-users, for several years. Now, GIDS is looking at using the welcoming secure space in our new premises for some of their meetings with their local service-users. This idea is still subject to internal NHS ratification, but it looks great!

Photo: Dr Tilly Langton and Dr Polly Carmichael of GIDS
As part of our Local Sustainability Fund grant, the Cabinet Office approved our Fair Access project, by which Intercom sets out to work in partnership with our colleagues in the NHS, local government and the police to set up a fairer more responsive funding structure for that part of the Trust's work — primarily of course the Help Support and Advocacy service — that falls within the remit of the public sector. Richard and Michael are working on this.

The public demand for our HSA service is heavy, and the needs that many clients bring to us are extreme; and for many of them issues of confidentiality are paramount. It is also of the greatest importance for many that they are approaching a community-led LGBT+ organisation which knows the issues and has earned broad and deep community trust and confidence.

But even setting aside all the critical issues around confidentiality, community skills and knowledge, and trust, these needs, and this service, are so specialised that the public sector cannot be expected to provide such a service themselves.

Ensuring our service is sustainable will affect the health and wellbeing of many people across the South West into the future. We'll do everything we can.

We are (still) Orlando

Intercom led a vigil in Exeter on 17 June in commemoration of the Orlando murders. The support the vigil received was amazing; there were about 200 present in spite of the short notice. The Lord Mayor of Exeter, Councillor Cynthia Thompson, was the first speaker, with her Deputy Lord Mayor, Councillor Peter Holland.

There were many unforgettable moments — the lovely performance by the Spectrum choir that closed the evening, the strong supportive words from the Police and Crime Commissioner, Alison Hernandez, and the Chief Constable, Sean Sawyer; the electrifying reading, by the Lord Mayor (left), of Wilfred Owen’s poem “What passing-bells, for these who die as cattle?”; Ben Bradshaw’s strong declaration of community solidarity against hatred; and the solemn tolling of the Cathedral bell, one stroke for each of the Orlando victims.

But the most unforgettable thing of all was the fact that the Dean and Chapter of Exeter Cathedral had welcomed this vigil with open arms, and given us the space on the Cathedral Green in front of the West Door. The Dean himself, Dr Jonathan Draper (right), the most senior member of the Chapter, welcomed the attenders and the event, and paid tribute to the dead.

Dr Draper went on to offer what was clearly a most heartfelt apology for the Church of England’s long history of marginalising LGBT+ people, and diminishing our lives. This deeply moved us all. It was clear afterwards that these words had had a personal meaning for many of those present.

And far above it all, the Cathedral flagpole was flying the rainbow flag, for the first time in its six centuries. The flag was at half-mast, in memory of the dead.

Unforgettable. Our very deepest thanks to all.

Flag photo: Bridget Garrood

The Fair Access project

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Generous donation for our new counselling-room

We are deeply grateful to the Trustees of a local Exeter charity, the St Edmonds and St Mary Major Charity, for a generous donation which has enabled us to get better furniture for our counselling-room in the new premises. This makes the room far more inviting and professional-looking than we could have afforded to make it. Our warmest thanks to the Trustees.
Self-help groups

Thanks to our new Big Lottery Fund support (Reaching Communities) we’re starting up new self-help groups for people who are particularly affected by social isolation.

Trans families

We’ve now had three meetings for families who have young gender-variant or Trans children in Cornwall, and our local support-workers are currently setting up new meetings in North Devon, Plymouth and Dorset. If you or anyone you know might be interested, have a chat with Max on 0800 612 3010.

Depression support group, Plymouth

Debbie, our local Plymouth worker, has set up a new self-help support-group for local LGBT+ people who are living with depression. This is in partnership with Side By Side, a project of MIND / Depression Alliance.

For more information, call Max on 0800 612 3010, or e-mail debbie@intercomtrust.org.uk.

And a new Group (breaking news)

Asylum-seekers and refugees

We’re just now setting up a new self-help support group for LGBT+ asylum-seekers and refugees (“ASR” people). The first meeting will be in Exeter, on Monday 26th September, 2 pm to 4pm. Again, anyone who’s interested, call Max on 0800 612 3010. The group plans to meet monthly. There is a small fund for paying travel-costs, but discuss this with Max before making definite arrangements.

This group is to support people who have fled their country in fear of their lives just because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Over 70 countries have laws criminalising same-sex acts — five of them threaten LGBT+ people with the death penalty. Because of this, many people come to the UK to claim asylum so that they can be who they are without the fear of violence, prison or death. However, we know that many LGBT+ ASR people are living in isolation.

The aim of this is to be a warm welcoming and friendly support group where people can be themselves without fear.

For more information, call Max on 0800 612 3010, or e-mail andy@intercomtrust.org.uk.

And finally....

We send our deepest thanks to all our long-term and committed funders who make our services possible. Their support delivers immense social benefit to local communities many of whose members are living with severe disadvantage, and need specialist support.

In particular we thank our major funders of the Help Support and Advocacy Service: the Police and Crime Commissioners for Devon & Cornwall, Dorset, and Wiltshire; the two Devon NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups; Cornwall Children’s Services; and the Big Lottery Fund.

And we also give our deepest thanks to those who fund our strategic and community-development work, in particular Comic Relief, the government’s Local Sustainability Fund (administered through BIG), Dorset Police, Wiltshire Council, Devon County Council, and Teignbridge District Council.

Finally, we are deeply grateful to many individuals who are private donors.

Contact us

Confidential South West Helpline:

0800 612 3010
helpline@intercomtrust.org.uk

Exeter (central office): 01392 201015
Bournemouth: 01202 201041
Plymouth: 01752 210454
Redruth: 01209 211360
Salisbury: 01722 567342

www.intercomtrust.org.uk

The Intercom Trust
Intercom Trust

Keep yourself up to date with what’s going on in your local area — events, community groups, community activities, and breaking LGBT+ news. The best way to stay up-to-date is to LIKE our Facebook page and FOLLOW us on Twitter.