

3.4 ReachOUT Case Study

There are eight parts to this section: (a) a brief history of ReachOUT as an organisation, (b) an overview of its development and growth, (c) a summary of the issues arising during Youth Group sessions, (d) the Youth Group's programme of activities, (e) an analysis of the Youth Group's membership, (f) young people's perspectives on ReachOUT, (g) workers' perspectives and (h) discussion.

(a) History of ReachOUT

In December 1994 a group of young people approached Berkshire County Council's Youth and Community Service and Reading Lesbian and Gay Helpline to express their need for support in developing a local bisexual, gay and lesbian youth project. Young people themselves, with guidance from workers, then actively lobbied Berkshire County Council for support. Several interested and skilled workers – from the Youth and Community Service and other statutory and voluntary sector agencies – then established a steering group to help the young people in this endeavour. Young people were active members of this steering group and individuals from particular agencies (for example Health Promotion, housing agencies, Social Services, etc.) with specialist skills were recruited.

Those members of the steering group who were qualified and skilled as Youth Workers also worked directly with the young people, developing a programme of educational and social activities and offering advice, information and support. The Youth Group met for the first time in May 1995 and thereafter every two weeks.

In 1995 the steering group conducted a need assessment with local bisexual, gay and lesbian young people, found premises for the Youth Group to meet, submitted a funding application to Berkshire County Council for accommodation costs and helped to recruit additional voluntary Youth Workers.

1996 was a year of rapid growth and progress for the organisation. In January ReachOUT became a formally constituted organisation. In June it secured a three-year grant from the National Lottery for a Research and Development Project. ReachOUT also secured an Annual Grant from Berkshire County Council to fund a part-time Youth Worker and the Youth Group began to meet every week.

In March 1997 the Research and Development Project began (see Section 1.4) and ReachOUT secured another Annual Grant from Berkshire County Council.

In 1998 ReachOUT was awarded an Annual Grant from Reading Borough Council (a unitary authority replacing Berkshire County Council). This was used to fund two part-time Youth Workers.

In 1999 ReachOUT secured an increase in its Annual Grant from Reading Borough Council to fund a third part-time Youth Worker for the Youth Group. ReachOUT also obtained a substantial grant from Berkshire Health Authority to consolidate and expand its core services.

(b) The Growth of the Youth Group

Since its formation, ReachOUT's Youth Group has grown both in terms of numbers and diversity. Chart 20 and Table 28 show the increase in the numbers of young people attending the Youth Group. Chart 20 shows the total number of *contacts* with young people as opposed to total membership (i.e. the same person attending every week was counted each time and not just once).

Chart 20: Youth Group Attendance from 1995 to 1999

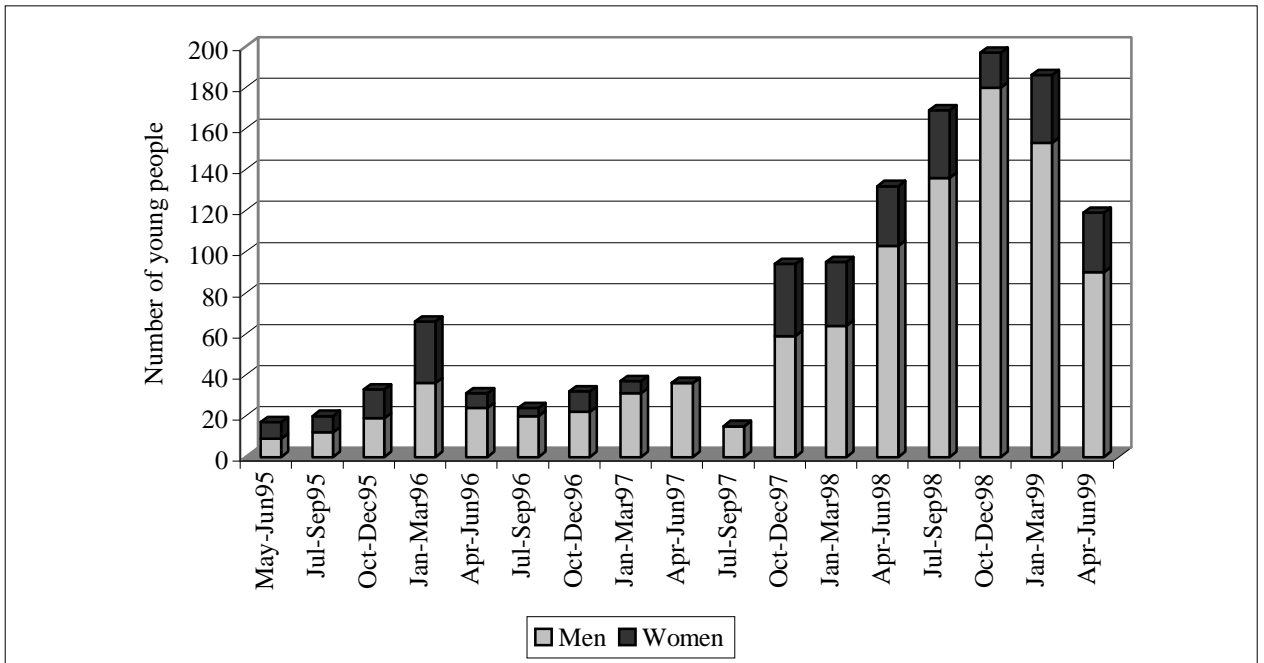


Table 28 shows the total number of Youth Group sessions, the total number of young people who were members, the gender mix, the total number of contacts and the average attendance at each session (the third column divided by the first).

Table 28: Summary of Youth Group Attendance 1995-99

Year	Total Number of Sessions	Total Number of Young People (Men:Women Ratio)	Total Number of Contacts	Average Attendance
1995	11	16 (8Men:8Women)	70	6.4
1996	29	35 (20M:15W)	151	5
1997	33	33 (26M:7W)	182	5.5
1998	48	48 (37M:11W)	593	12
1999*	20	60 (42M:18W)	305	15.25

*Note: This is not a complete year's data set, only January-June.

Given that the projected membership for 1999 is 120 young people, the membership of the Youth Group will have increased eight-fold since 1995.

The Youth Group has also grown in terms of diversity. The number of young women attending has doubled since 1995. Tables 29 and 30 show the increase in diversity in terms of the ethnic mix.

Table 29: Ethnic Identity of Young People attending the Youth Group in 1998

	Asian	Black	White
Men	4	3	30
Women			11

Table 30: Ethnic Identity of Young People attending the Youth Group in 1999

	Asian	Black	White
Men	3	4	34
Women		2	16

The Youth Group has also become more diverse in terms of its members' class, cultural and religious backgrounds.

(c) Summary of Issues Arising during Youth Group Sessions

Figures 28, 29, 30 and 31 summarise the main issues arising during Youth Group sessions as noted by the Youth Workers. This data was obtained from records kept by them.

Figure 28: Summary of Issues Arising during Youth Group Sessions in 1995

Session	Issues Arising
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Coming out. ▪ Coming out to parents. ▪ The need for one-to-one support.
July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Young people wanting discretion re their attendance at ReachOUT. ▪ Under-age drinking. ▪ Mental health (clinical depression, medication, nervous breakdowns, the effects of mental health problems on friends). ▪ Being out and outed.
August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Young people wanting to meet weekly and wanting better facilities. ▪ The fact that more men were attending than women. ▪ Sexual health.
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Alcohol and religion (a debate about whether or not to go to the pub after the session with regards to a Muslim member). ▪ Parent issues.
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The need for young people to talk. ▪ The growing confidence and personal development of the young people. ▪ Relationship problems. ▪ Suicidal feelings of family members/partners. ▪ Being out and bisexual, gay or lesbian at home. ▪ An older man offering young men money for sex (child protection issues and when to intervene).
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Young people responded to a homophobic County councillor with a letter.
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Younger men's fear of older men.

Figure 29: Summary of Issues Arising during Youth Group Sessions in 1996

Session	Issues Arising
January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Self-defence. ▪ Age of consent. ▪ Assertiveness. ▪ The lack of disabled members and their invisibility. ▪ The lack of Asian and Black members.

February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Alcohol. ▪ Conflict within the Youth Group. ▪ Groundrules.
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Distress (being bullied at school for being bisexual, gay or lesbian). ▪ Stereotypes (specifically, what should bisexuals, gays and lesbians be like and look like?)
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Health issues. ▪ Resources and information needed and wanted by the young people.
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Alcohol. ▪ Problems of family relations and violence within the family.
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mental health (depression and isolation).
July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Homophobia in the local media.
August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ National press incident re National Lottery grant – had to change venue.
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of confidence. ▪ Negative vibes among the young people because the Youth Group is too small. ▪ Stereotypes. ▪ International bisexual, gay and lesbian human rights. ▪ View that the Youth Group is too small and this is putting people off. ▪ Poetry as a means of expression.
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Development of the Youth Group and new premises. ▪ Relationships. ▪ Uncertainty about sexual identity. ▪ Coming out to parents. ▪ Housing issues.
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pressure of exams.
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Welfare and housing benefits. ▪ Different cultures/festivals. ▪ Bisexual, gay and lesbian parenting. ▪ Bisexual, gay and lesbian history. ▪ Coming out and being outed. ▪ Homelessness. ▪ Presentation by Stonewall re campaigns, equality, human rights, etc.

Figure 30: Summary of Issues Arising during Youth Group Sessions in 1997

Session	Issues Arising
January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Bisexual, gay and lesbian films. ▪ Work issues. ▪ The need to publicise the Youth Group.
February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Evaluation: what do young people want from the Youth Workers?

February [cont.]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Young people didn't want to talk about the issues raised in 'Beautiful Thing' (Channel 4 film about being young, gay and coming out) because it was too personal.
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Coming out at school and work. ▪ Bisexual, gay and lesbian scene. ▪ Stereotypes (are we bisexual gay or lesbian enough?) ▪ Confidence in their identities and others' reactions to them. ▪ Pink and black triangles. ▪ Bisexual, gay and lesbian history. ▪ Nazi concentration camps. ▪ Human rights and oppressions. ▪ Making links with other bisexual, gay and lesbian youth groups. ▪ Exam worries.
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Hobbies. ▪ Professions and work issues. ▪ The need for one-to-one support. ▪ Bereavement (family member). ▪ The need for one-to-one support. ▪ Evaluation: what brought people to ReachOUT?
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What you want to do versus what are you expected to do as young bisexual, gay and lesbian people. ▪ Death from AIDS. ▪ Safer sex (apprehension among the young people). ▪ Safer sex. ▪ Relationships. ▪ Use of language around sex. ▪ HIV (different levels of knowledge and confidence). ▪ Support around mental health. ▪ Alcohol and pub culture.
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Meeting socially outside the Youth Group. ▪ Developing friendship networks. ▪ Expectations of the Pride Festival. ▪ Bisexual, gay and lesbian characters on TV. ▪ Bisexual gay and lesbian politics and history.
July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Difficulties at home (being thrown out after neglect and violence). ▪ Making friends and having sex with each other and falling out. ▪ Wanting to know what is going on locally and nationally and wanting to get involved.
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Being out, proud and visible. ▪ Representing ReachOUT in public. ▪ Group dynamics. ▪ Body image and eating disorders, being fat and thin, worrying about fashion and fitting in. ▪ Coming out versus living a lie. ▪ Heterosexual friends versus bisexual, gay and lesbian friends. ▪ Alcohol. ▪ Expectations and pressures on young bisexual, gay and lesbian people.
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Intrigue about sex and sexual practices. ▪ Relationships. ▪ Safer sex.

November [cont.]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Getting bisexual, gay and lesbian issues on the political agenda. ▪ HIV and AIDS, safer sex and fears and ignorance. ▪ Sexist language against gay men on scene. ▪ Wanting to know about local services. ▪ People's cultures and origins. ▪ Cultural diversity within Youth Group. ▪ Identity. ▪ Getting to know people and not just judging on appearances.
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Self-defence. ▪ Feeling unsure about sexual identity and needing to talk. ▪ Coming out. ▪ Relationships and breaking up. ▪ Being out.

Figure 31: Summary of Issues Arising during Youth Group Sessions in 1998

Session	Issues Arising
January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Previous member returning to group having grown in confidence, having survived their hellish past. ▪ Being outed. ▪ How to find out if friends are bisexual, gay or lesbian? ▪ Stereotypes in bisexual, gay and lesbian community. ▪ Wanting to link with other bisexual, gay and lesbian youth projects. ▪ Stereotypes within the bisexual, gay and lesbian community. ▪ Being very out. ▪ Feeling lonely in school and feeling isolated.
February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Drugs: fear and interest in drugs, broad range of drug experience and drug taking. ▪ Housing issues. ▪ Family relations. ▪ Anonymity when attending the Youth group. ▪ Drugs on scene. ▪ HIV and AIDS and safer sex. ▪ After coming out, how to meet people and how to spot other bisexuals, gays and lesbians in heterosexual space. ▪ Sexual abuse disclosure. ▪ Alcohol abuse.
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cottaging and cruising: wanting to promote ReachOUT to young people using public sex environments. ▪ Violence from ex-partners. ▪ The need to talk and for one-to-one sessions. ▪ Information about Asian bisexual, gay and lesbian support. ▪ Heterosexuals coming to group. ▪ Self-harm through alcohol, drugs, over-working, pressuring themselves to socialise and not looking after themselves. ▪ Mental health (clinical) and pressures on friends. ▪ Housing issues. ▪ Culture-abuse-identity and identity confusion. ▪ Drug use. ▪ Legal issues.

April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ownership of the Youth Group and change. ▪ Resources and information. ▪ Fear of the Asian community knowing that you're bisexual, gay or lesbian. ▪ Self-defence. ▪ Offensive language. ▪ The need for one-to-one support. ▪ Homelessness and need for emergency accommodation. ▪ Shock and bereavement. ▪ Arranged marriages. ▪ Angry and intrusive parents. ▪ Mental health (Prozac).
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Funeral and death. ▪ Coming out. ▪ Feelings. ▪ Skipping school and work after coming out. ▪ Death and bereavement.
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Violence at home and homelessness. ▪ Coming out. ▪ Wanting to be visible and positive at the Annual General Meeting, wanting to be taken seriously by parents and people in positions of authority. ▪ Coming out. ▪ Violence on bisexual, gay and lesbian scene. ▪ Anger and frustration. ▪ Encouraging others to come out and sharing experiences. ▪ Homophobia and violence. ▪ Coming out and family reactions.
July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Exam worries. ▪ Unemployment. ▪ Depression. ▪ Coming out. ▪ Confidence. ▪ Emotions and sharing experiences. ▪ Sexism and challenging the origins and use of language. ▪ Relationships. ▪ The need for future support. ▪ Identity and what do young people want out of life versus expectations and pressures on them to do the 'right' thing.
August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Abusive families. ▪ Trust among the young people. ▪ Sexual abuse and violence at home related to sexual identity. ▪ The need for one-to-one sessions and to talk. ▪ Bereavement. ▪ Coming out. ▪ Relationships. ▪ Problems within families (being excluded).
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Violence at home. ▪ Starting back at school/college. ▪ Anxiety about going to university and making new friends.

September [cont.]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mental health. ▪ Drugs. ▪ Relationships. ▪ Stereotyping. ▪ Self-harm. ▪ How important the Youth Group is for people. ▪ Events outside the Youth Group affecting the group's dynamics. ▪ Family illness. ▪ Relationships. ▪ Friendships. ▪ Young people banned from the pubs. ▪ Difficulties of not being out to parents and having to lie. ▪ Sexual abuse within the bisexual, gay and lesbian community. ▪ Mental health. Loss of partners/bereavement. ▪ Drug use. ▪ Eating disorders, image, fashion and feeling pressured. ▪ Housing issues.
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Need for counselling sessions. ▪ Management Committee membership. ▪ Research project. ▪ Body image: pre-judging people on the basis of looks and appearance, etc. and being negative about people rather than positive. ▪ Stereotypes about parts of the town. ▪ Fear of racism. ▪ Eating disorders. ▪ Not enough young women in the Youth Group, women feeling marginalised. ▪ Alcohol issues.
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Problems and feelings around HIV and sexual health. ▪ Coming out stories. ▪ Relationships. ▪ Age of consent. ▪ World AIDS Day. ▪ Asian issues and sexual identity. ▪ The need to talk and the need for one-to-one support. ▪ Bereavement. ▪ Serious illness and memories of people and animals who have died. ▪ Feelings. ▪ Families and reactions to death. ▪ World AIDS Day. ▪ Asian identity and sexual identity. ▪ Families and bisexual, gay and lesbian parenting. ▪ Stereotypes within the bisexual, gay and lesbian community. ▪ Expectations about appearance and fashion. ▪ Being unemployed.
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sexual health. ▪ Parental alcoholism. ▪ Illness. ▪ Finding employment. ▪ Being abused and harassed. ▪ Safety of individuals and the Youth Group. ▪ Violence when coming out. ▪ Sexist language and racist comments. ▪ Leaving home.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Safety of the Youth Group. ▪ Violence within the bisexual, gay and lesbian community. ▪ Bullying and harassment. ▪ Safe housing. ▪ Family threats, harassment and pressure, leaving home, police and young people's safety.
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Figure 32 summarises postal requests from young people.

Figure 32: Postal Requests from Young People

Date	Area of Residence	Request
May 97	Reading	Young gay man, aged 17, was feeling isolated. He requested information about ReachOUT.
June 97	Reading	Young lesbian, aged 16, was feeling lonely and wanted to meet others.
Sept 97	Newbury	Young gay man, aged 14, requested a list of gay fiction.
Mar 98	Reading	Young gay man, aged 24, was feeling stressed. He stated he was wary of the scene and stated that he was lacking in confidence. He requested information about ReachOUT and access to counselling.

(d) Youth Group Programme of Activities

Table 31 shows the programme of activities during the autumn of 1998.

Table 31: Summary of Youth Group's Programme of Activities

Date of Session	Activity
2 September	'Chill out' night.
9 September	Group games and video night.
16 September	Trip out.
23 September	Bowling.
30 September	Mental health workshop.
7 October	Presentation on Research and Development Project and recruitment for interviews and surveys.
14 October	Body image workshop.
21 October	Go-karting.
28 October	Halloween party night.
4 November	'Chill out' night.
11 November	Asian and Black issues workshop.

18 November	Preparation for Caribbean Christmas party.
25 November	Cinema.
2 December	Sexual health workshop.
9 December	Poetry workshop.
16 December	Caribbean Christmas party.

The programme was devised by the young people themselves and was a mixture of educational and social activities. The programme was organised and facilitated by the team of Youth Workers (or by workers from other agencies with the necessary experience and skills), both paid and voluntary.

(e) Analysis of the Youth Group's Membership

The data below was extracted from a random sample of the Youth Group's membership during the autumn of 1998 (from Monitoring Forms).

- 40 young people completed the Monitoring Form: 32 young men and eight young women.
- One young person was aged 15 at the time of completing the form, three were aged 16, four were aged 17, nine were aged 18, eight were aged 19, six were aged 20, three were aged 21, two were aged 22, one was aged 24 and two were aged 25.
- Seven young people were aged 15 when they first attended the Youth Group, five were aged 16, six were aged 18, four were aged 19, six were aged 20, four were aged 21, two were aged 22, two were aged 23, one was aged 24 and one was aged 25.
- 20 young people reported that they attend the Youth Group every week, nine every fortnight, four once a month and eight once in a while.
- Three young people identified as bisexual, 24 as gay and seven as lesbian. Six were unsure of their sexual identity.
- One young person identified as Black Caribbean, one as European, one as Irish, three as Pakistani, two as Polish, 28 as white British and four as mixed race.
- One young person was registered as disabled.
- Two young people were living alone, 27 with family, seven with friends and three with relatives.
- Six young people were at school, nine were at college, two were at university, two were unemployed and 21 were working.

- 15 young people found out about ReachOUT through friends, 16 through Reading Lesbian and Gay Helpline, one through publicity material and eight in other ways (including three through the *Gay Times* and one through Reading Women's Information Centre).
- 17 young people came to ReachOUT through friends, 18 through the Helpline, two through ReachOUT's Info-line/mobile and three in other ways (one was referred by a Social Worker).
- One young person lived in Farnborough, one in Henley, one in Hungerford, one in Maidenhead, one in Newbury, 32 in Reading, two in Slough and one in Wokingham.

(f) Young People's Perspectives

Young people made the following statements as part of the Youth Workers' evaluation exercise (13 participated):

I come to ReachOUT because...

"I meet new people and it's a laugh."

"It is very relaxing and an alternative to the scene."

"I want to meet and be around young people like myself."

"I get a sense of family as we are all in the same boat."

"To meet other young people." (Three young people.)

"To make new friends." (Five young people.)

"To get involved in gay issues and to socialise."

"To have fun and make friends."

The first time I came to ReachOUT I felt...

"Nervous." (Seven young people.)

"Scared."

When I went home I felt...

"Happy." (Eight young people.)

“Reassured.”

The things I like about ReachOUT include...

“It is a relaxing place.” (Two young people.)

“Meeting new people.”

“Talk about things we can’t outside [the Youth Group].”

“There is a sense of family.”

“I can meet people away from the scene.”

“The supportive Youth Workers.” (Two young people.)

Some of things I find difficult about being bisexual, gay, lesbian or unsure include...

“Feeling excluded from the heterosexual community.”

“Not feeling able to come out.” (Two people.)

“Other people’s attitude and reactions. It’s all a big secret.”

“Pretending to be heterosexual.”

“Discrimination and not finding the right person as a partner.”

“Lying to my family.”

“That I can’t be open about who I am in all areas of my life.”

Some of things I might want to talk about at ReachOUT are...

“Coming out.” (Two young people.)

“Finding the right person.”

“Safer sex.”

If there was anything I could change or improve about ReachOUT it would be...

“Bigger space.” (Three young people.)

“More fun activities.” (Two young people.)

“More visits to other places and groups.” (Two young people.)

The attitude of the Youth Workers is...

“Excellent” (Eight young people.)

“Very good.” (Five young people.)

Do you enjoy the space provided by ReachOUT?

“Yes.” (Ten young people.)

“No it’s too small.” (Two young people.)

General comments...

“I would like the opportunity for a one-to-one session if I need it, to discuss problems.”

“The publicity could be improved”

“We need a male worker.”

“Young people to lead the sessions.”

“More promotion and more women.”

“I want to do fundraising events and drama performances.”

“It has been a lifeline for me and I’m sure it is for others.”

Young people made the following statements during the evaluation exercise:

“ReachOUT has been a lifeline for me.”

“ReachOUT helps young people to define their feelings about sexuality, to develop a positive self image, and allows us to socialise with people of our own age who are in similar situations, whilst in a safe, stable and secure environment.”

“ReachOUT has books that I would feel embarrassed asking for in a book shop or library, and anyway, there is very little stocked in public libraries.”

“I think ReachOUT should advertise in the local papers and magazines and publicise itself in local schools.” (Two young people.)

“I think ReachOUT should meet more than once a week.” (Two young people.)

“Something in between finding out and coming to ReachOUT without knowing anyone for the first time would be good.”

(g) Workers' Perspectives

The following data was extracted from a group interview with ReachOUT steering group/Management Committee members and Youth Workers from the early days of the organisation. These workers highlighted a number of issues relating to its development, particularly its early development:

- Young people identified the need for a bisexual, gay and lesbian youth project and they made the case to Berkshire County Council. This was an important part of securing the political support of the councillors and officers, using the argument that the Youth and Community Service should respond and support this endeavour as part of its remit.
- Young people's involvement and participation in the decision-making process, their investment in the project, was central from the beginning.
- The importance of experienced and skilled people to both staff the steering group and work with the young people was clear from the beginning. These people had knowledge of bisexual, gay and lesbian issues, knowledge of youth service processes and procedures (boundaries, confidentiality, safety, etc.) and knowledge of youth issues.
- It was important that the group of workers developed as a team: sharing a common approach to working, a shared vision and working towards the same aim and objectives.
- Young people were keen to start meeting as a group immediately. This pressure influenced the steering group/workers and quickened the pace of development accordingly, sometimes too fast given the amount of groundwork and preparation that was needed.
- Initial problems included a lack of funds, staff and a venue to meet. For example, the workers operated out of boxes for the first 18 months.
- The young people's needs initially outstripped the ability of the steering group and workers to deliver.
- The ability to plan, both organisational development and the young people's programme of activities, was difficult given the voluntary nature of the organisation in the early days.
- The anonymity and confidentiality of the Youth Group (its meeting place and membership) and individual and group safety were important issues for the workers and young people.
- The workload, both organisational and working with young people, was overwhelming and fell on a few shoulders. The need quickly arose to expand the steering group membership.

- Reading Lesbian and Gay Helpline was the main referral agency from the start. The workers delivered a training course for Helpline volunteers around bisexual, gay and lesbian youth issues and the referral procedure.
- The steering group and workers favoured 50 per cent representation of young people on the management structure of the organisation but this proved difficult to achieve at times. Although the workers were used to developing and working within management and organisational structures, some of the young people were not. Furthermore, some of the young people just wanted to use the service; they did not want to manage the project. This meant that some organisational development was worker-led as there was not the capacity or time for it to be user-led as the Youth Group needed to be operational. This became an on-going dilemma/tension between the need to develop and operate services and the need to involve young people.
- There was a lack of consistency in the early days in terms of staffing and venue and this resulted in fluctuating attendance. This in turn impacted on the psychology of the group and made involving the young people in its development more difficult.
- The successful National Lottery application resulted in extensive negative press coverage and the need to change venue.
- Even during periods when few young people were using the service, the workers held onto the view that it was important to offer the service no matter how few used it.
- The National Lottery grant and project had a significant impact. It enabled ReachOUT to develop a permanent space for the first time. This was important to the young people and workers. Having a full-time worker enabled significant development and research work to be conducted which could not have occurred otherwise. This was the beginning of a coming out process for ReachOUT as an organisation and a more public profile emerged.
- The assistance and support of the Youth and Community Service (first Berkshire County Council then Reading Borough Council) has been instrumental to ReachOUT's development.
- The organisational structures often did not keep pace with the growth of the organisation. Sometimes it was a case of crisis management and a process of 'catch up'. Similarly the demands on the young people for their involvement/participation were problematic at times and could not be achieved despite the organisational commitment to it.
- The Research and Development Project expanded the focus and responsibility of the Management Committee and this was problematic at times. For example, there was an issue of gearing: the work generated by a *full-time* worker *vis-à-vis* the management capacity of a *voluntary* committee that met *quarterly* and the need to consult and involve young people who met *weekly*.
- ReachOUT's development had been organic and responsive. There was no model to follow; the organisation was breaking new ground.

- There were difficulties associated with meeting the needs of the diverse age range: 15 to 25. Very often, the needs of younger people are different to those who are older. Catering for these needs within one programme was sometimes difficult.
- There was an issue of providing services to young people under the age of 16. ReachOUT has assisted young people aged 15 and even as young as 13. However, this is a politically sensitive issue and had been addressed on a case by case basis to date.
- ReachOUT held its first 'Development Day' in 1997. This provided an opportunity for all members of the organisation: Management Committee members, staff and young people to meet, team build, review and plan the development of the organisation. This proved a useful tool and is now an annual event.
- The Youth Group's phenomenal growth generated several problems, principally those of space and staff. The group is so large that the Youth Workers often had too little time to offer one-to-one support. Furthermore, the programme of activities also requires significant organisation and planning, in addition to direct work. Part-time staff was not sufficient.
- There was a clear need for an outreach worker to meet the needs of those not currently accessing ReachOUT.
- There was some debate between the workers as to whether ReachOUT should remain an independent voluntary organisation or whether it should lobby to become integrated into the mainstream Youth and Community Service. There were pros and cons to both. What was clear however was the need for larger premises and full-time staff.
- The workers discussed the need to respond to the diverse range of needs within the Youth Group: specialist provision, more sessions, etc. The potential to expand into new areas was also discussed, for example, consultancy and training for other agencies. However, there was the dilemma/tension between concentrating on the core services and possibly dissipating energy by over-extending the organisation. A possible solution may be for ReachOUT to facilitate rather than provide services directly.

(h) Discussion

It is clear that the Youth Group's membership has grown considerably over the past four years, both in terms of numbers and in terms of diversity. This growth was a result of targeted (as opposed to universal) publicity and the increased profile of the organisation generally.

Youth Workers noted several recurring issues and needs pertaining to young bisexuals, gays, lesbians and those who are unsure:

- The need for individual and group anonymity and confidentiality.
- Coming out and being out.
- Commercial sex work.
- Cottaging and cruising (public sex environments).
- Family expectations and pressures.
- Making friends and relationships.
- Gay and lesbian history.
- Homophobia, individual and community safety and self-defence.
- Housing and homelessness.
- Invisibility of Asian and Black young people, cultural issues and racism.
- Invisibility of women and sexism.
- Mental health issues: alcohol and drug use and abuse, body image, clinical mental illness, depression, self-harm and suicide.
- The need for one-to-one support and space to talk.
- Stereotypes, stereotyping and sense of self.

These issues and needs – for advice, fun, information, socialising and support – are reflected in the Youth Group's programme of educational and social activities. They also correspond with the findings of the survey and interviews with young people.

In terms of the membership of the Youth Group in autumn 1998:

- Most of those who attended were aged 20 and under.
- Most had started to attend at an early age (many under the age of consent).
- Most attended on a regular basis (weekly or every fortnight).
- Most were sure about their sexual identity although a minority was unsure.
- Most members were white although several members were Asian or Black *men*.
- Most members lived with their family and were at school or college, or were working.
- The majority found about ReachOUT either through friends or through the Reading Lesbian and Gay Helpline. Similarly, most members accessed the Youth Group through friends or the Helpline.
- Although most members lived in the Reading area, the Youth Group had a wide catchment area: from Farnborough in the South to Henley in the north, and Hungerford in the west to Slough in the east.

From the Youth Worker's evaluation exercise it seems that most young people were enthusiastic and positive about the Youth Group. For most it was a valuable resource, enabling the discussion of issues, and important for making new friends, socialising and obtaining support through educational and social activities and quiet time. Many were apprehensive on their first visit but were content and excited by the end of their first session, reflecting the fun and safe environment ReachOUT and its Youth Workers have created.

Given the realities of life for many young bisexual, gay and lesbian people, the need for ReachOUT as a specialised project and resource, as evidenced by several of the young people's comments, was clear.

In terms of the development of ReachOUT as an organisation, several important issues arose:

- The importance of young people's involvement, the dilemma and tension between service user *involvement* and *participation* and *user-led* development, and how to manage and resolve this dilemma and tension.
- The need and value of experienced and skilled staff.
- The need to develop a programme of activities for young people in addition to offering advice, information and support.
- The need for a permanent venue and sufficient funds.

- The need to develop effective and efficient management and organisational structures with as much input from young people *as is achievable*.
- The essential role of service evaluation and periodic reviews, both at the micro-level (the day to day provision of services) and macro-level (organisational structures and direction and vision).
- The need for adequate planning and preparation.
- The need and value of lobbying and political support.
- The need to manage the workload of the organisation.
- The need to channel/manage young people's enthusiasm and impatience.
- The need for research to highlight issues and needs; to aid young people-focused development.
- The need and value of organic organisational development and growth, as opposed to adopting or prescribing models.
- The need to manage development and growth: to be *pro-active* rather than *crisis-led*.

In terms of the future, ReachOUT hopes to build on the success of the Research and Development Project and the Youth Group by:

- (a) Consolidating and expanding core services through additional activity-based sessions, information sessions, one-to-one sessions and specialist provision for Asian and Black young people and young women.
- (b) Developing a programme of outreach work – in local colleges, schools, youth centres and on the bisexual, gay and lesbian scene – to offer advice, information and support to those not currently accessing services.
- (c) Assisting the development of new bisexual, gay and lesbian youth projects in areas of the county where there is no provision.
- (d) Acting as an advocate and consultant, so helping to improve local statutory and voluntary services.
- (e) Providing training to local statutory and voluntary sector agencies using the research findings to highlight the experiences, issues and needs of bisexual, gay and lesbian youth.

Some of these initiatives represent forays into new territory for ReachOUT. Once again ReachOUT is involved in pioneering work.