

# Preface

It has been argued by some that the election of the New Labour Government in May 1997 heralded a sea change in terms of the philosophy of government and its approach to governing. A raft of consultation documents, policy reviews and statements around active citizenship, empowerment, ‘joined-up thinking’, partnership, social exclusion and social inclusion have followed. In 1997 the Government established the Social Exclusion Unit, a cross-departmental unit in the heart of Whitehall:

Tackling social exclusion is one of the Government’s highest priorities, as demonstrated by its actions since coming to office... Many Government Departments are already involved in tackling social exclusion – and will continue to do so. The Social Exclusion Unit will focus on some of the most difficult problems, where several Departments need to work together and where solutions have been very hard to find. Its aim is to improve understanding of these problems; promote co-operation between departments; and make recommendations to tackle social exclusion more effectively, in particular to shift the focus of policies towards preventing social exclusion rather than merely dealing with its consequences (Cabinet Office, 1998).

While maintaining a healthy scepticism, these initiatives are to be welcomed. As the title of this report suggests, ReachOUT hopes that the approach and philosophy of social inclusion will truly shape central and local government policies, and that genuine consultation and genuine partnerships between the statutory and voluntary sectors – recognising their respective strengths and weaknesses – will emerge.

Young bisexual, gay and lesbian people are a discriminated against, marginalised and socially excluded group. Evidence to support these assertions is to be found throughout this report. These young people’s experiences, issues and needs are often neglected, their voices unheard, by mainstream agencies and services. This neglect and silence reinforces their exclusion. This is a vicious circle that needs to be broken because if social inclusion is to mean anything then the voices of young bisexual, gay and lesbian people need to be heard and acted upon.

ReachOUT as a trusted community-based organisation with an established track record of delivering quality services is best placed to offer a platform to local young bisexuals, gays and lesbians to raise their voices. ReachOUT can also act as vehicle for mainstream agencies and services to contact this hard-to-reach and socially excluded group. To perform these functions however, ReachOUT needs support, financial and otherwise.

ReachOUT looks forward to being genuinely consulted and to forging effective and genuine partnerships with the local statutory and voluntary sector, with the express aim of improving everyday life for bisexual, gay and lesbian youth.

ReachOUT, September 1999.