

In the frame: inclusive imagery



A really important step towards making your service or organisation more welcoming and inclusive to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people is making sure that the images you use are diverse and inclusive.

LGBT Age and Open Aye put together two focus groups to find out what kind of images older LGBT people would like to see, and how professionals might go about finding, making and using them. These ten tips, written by photographer Becky Duncan of Open Aye, are designed to help you to create publicity and information materials which proactively send the message that LGBT people are welcome in your services. You may wish to use these tips to find the best images you can within stock photo libraries, or you may wish to create your own!

1. Use relevant photographs

- ★ Current UK mass media portrayals of older LGBT community are practically non-existent. Counter this with good real relevant imagery in your own communications materials. Use real models, real emotions, real life, and believable situations. This will come through in the photographs and will evoke more positive reactions.

2. Ensure ethical image use

- ★ Before considering the use of an image always be certain that appropriate permissions were granted (by photographer / model, subject, sometimes even building & location owners). This is especially important when considering use of images of Pride marches, or when utilising competition entries, for example.

3. Use respectful imagery that empowers

- ★ Use visual codes and cultural references try and create an image of authority and respect for the people portrayed (not just reverting to clichés and stereotypes for ease). This might include images taken from a low angle, images with a blue sky behind, images showing people looking confident or happy, or many other codes and references.



This was the kind of image our focus group liked – showing people who look “real”, who are showing emotion, and who are affectionate. It’s a positive, joyful image, shot from a slightly lower angle, which empowers the people in it.

4. Reflect the diverse priorities of the LGBT community

- ★ Think about different ways to create empowering images, which include a diverse range of people. For example: traditional media representation tends to show men as powerful through wealth and status, whilst women are powerful through beauty and appearance; challenge this and reflect a wider, more forward looking attitude. Strength of character can portray power too, as can perceived freedom and autonomy.

5. Consider the context and audience for the image

- ★ Do you need to show an individual? A couple? Overt or subtle relationships? What is the message you are trying to convey? Tell real stories with your images. Congratulate the strength of an individual. Use photo techniques to visually empower a transgender person. Celebrate a couple's relationship. This goes beyond just showing a rainbow flag to illustrate an article.



Our focus group really didn't like this kind of image – it's posed, it doesn't look real, and it's strange that they are not wearing shirts! The group felt that it was positive to show sexualised and loving relationships, but it was important that they came across as real and tasteful.

They also didn't like many of the images of which were trying to show transgender people – almost all of the people shown were drag queens. These images do not represent the trans community as a whole, but are often used that way. There was a lack of pictures of transgender people in "ordinary" situations and clothes, going about their everyday lives.



6. Show diverse situations, people, and actions

- ★ Older LGBT community is a vast and varied group of people who do not live one story, but many. Try and portray a range of identities, situations and scenarios. This included showing people who are disabled, who have different ethnicities, etc.

7. Be appropriate

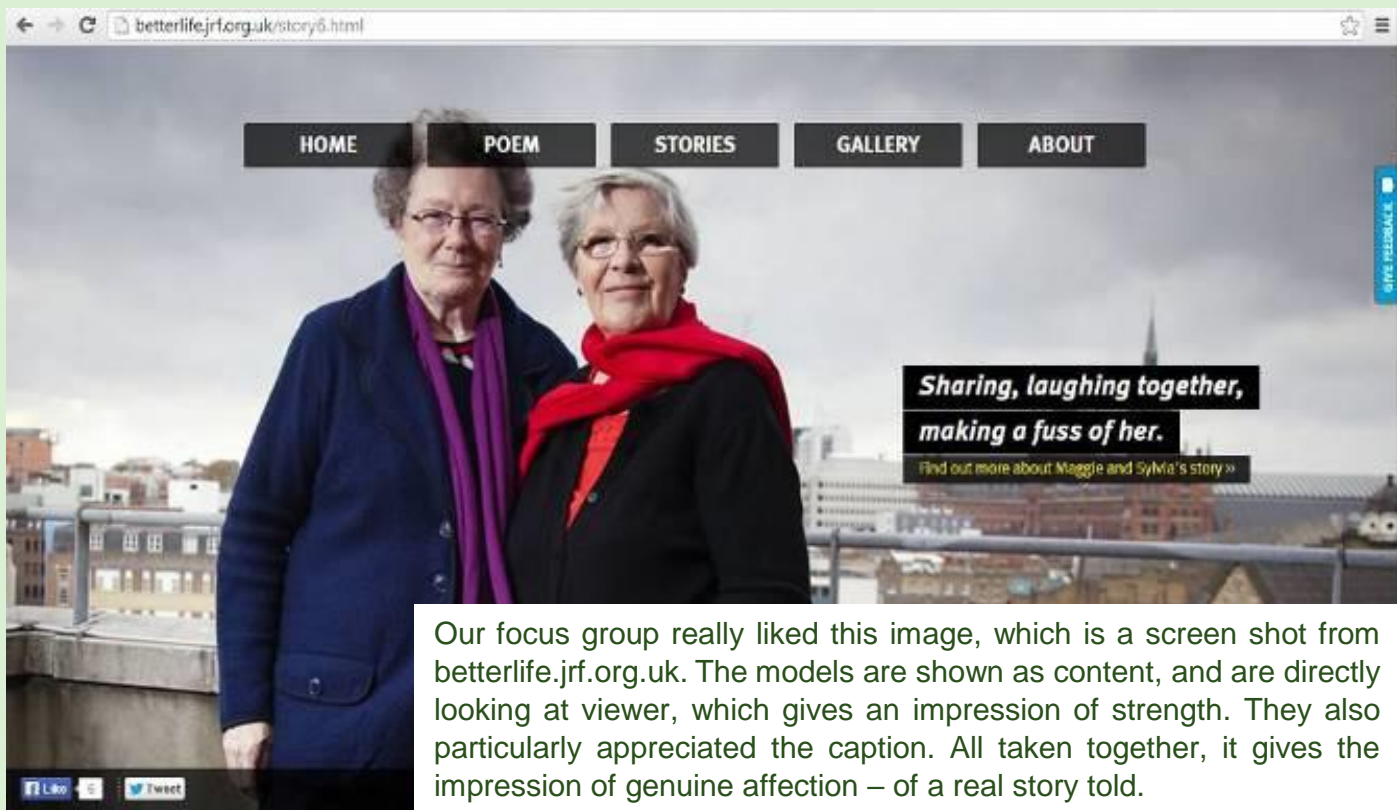
- ★ Do not show mismatched photos and words (smiley people to illustrate an article about suicide, to give a real example). If appropriate photos are not available or faces not appropriate for your message, consider the use of symbols and illustration.

8. Where possible, use the best quality images you can

- ★ Consider content, context, composition, colour, representation, style, body language, background, relevancy, realism, authenticity, creativity and integrity!

9. Use images of LGBT people in lots of different communications, not just ones relating to the LGBT community

- ★ If 5-7% of the population are LGBT, why aren't 5-7% of all images used reflective of this? Recent press coverage of changes in legislation (same sex marriage bill passed in Scotland 2014) have resulted in some "normalisation" of LGBT imagery in mass media. But this is just the start. It will take progressive organisations tackling this properly for true equality to be really reflected.



Our focus group really liked this image, which is a screen shot from betterlife.jrf.org.uk. The models are shown as content, and are directly looking at viewer, which gives an impression of strength. They also particularly appreciated the caption. All taken together, it gives the impression of genuine affection – of a real story told.

10. Support a bespoke image library which represents older LGBT people

- ★ Stock image libraries don't have many appropriate images that represent the LGBT community. If you are able to pay for it, commissioning bespoke imagery is a great idea. Relevant, genuine Scottish LGBT imagery which follows these tips would have a huge positive impact. Use the full report on this focus group as a brief for your photographer.
- ★ Join up with other organisations to create an image bank together, which you can all use. Professional photography which considers context, content, compositions, ethics etc is essential for the long term sustainability of an older LGBT image bank. Use the full report on this focus group to brief the people involved in your project.
- ★ Start a free, real, LGBT image library using people's existing images which they are happy to share. People's images of weddings, relationships, families, everyday lives and leisure past times could combine to create a lovely, real set of photographs which could be called upon when such photos are needed by a collection of relevant organisations. Warning! Full informed consent would also be required here! It would be need to be made clear to anyone participating in this collection what the images might be used for, when, how and by whom. Everyone featured in the images would need to give signed consent. Only good quality images should be used and disseminated, with signed permission forms distributed to partners using the images.
- ★ Hold Participatory Photography Workshops for members of LGBT Age community. Open Aye could continue this consultation process whilst offering some transformative, inspirational participatory photo workshops to community members. Participants would be given cameras, tools and inspiration to create their own suite of images which could go some way to empowering the community to tell their own story.

More resources are available for free at
Lgbthealth.org.uk/resources