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STONE *wall*
HOUSING
ASSOCIATION

Stonewall H.A.
67 Cowcross St.,
EC1M 6BP.
01-608-1923

GLC
funded

Stonewall Housing Association is a housing association with exempt charitable status. It was registered in October 1983 as a Friendly Society under the Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1965. The aim of Stonewall is to provide accommodation for young lesbians and gay men who are homeless or in housing need as a result of the reaction of others to their sexuality. Initially we plan to provide short stay accommodation, but we intend to assist the residents to find permanent housing. Stonewall is currently funded by the Greater London Council until March 1986. Further revenue funding will be sought for the financial year 1986/1987 and beyond to supplement the Hostel Deficit Grant which will be received from the Department of the Environment. The project employs two part-time development workers who are accountable to a Management Committee made up of lesbians and gay men with expertise in such areas as homelessness amongst single people, housing association work, and education. The Management Committee also includes representatives from the Greater London Council, and from Circle 33 Housing Trust, which is developing Stonewall's houses.

HOMELESSNESS AMONGST YOUNG SINGLE PEOPLE

It is obvious that good housing is a basic need, and should be a fundamental right for everyone. Yet this isn't the case. The Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 acknowledges this only to the extent that certain categories of homeless people have a right to be housed by the Local Authority; for example, if there are children involved. Single homeless people only have a statutory right if they are considered 'vulnerable'. Examples of 'vulnerability' are:

- elderly people
- young people at risk of sexual or financial exploitation
- physically or mentally disabled people.

In all these cases, the conditions would only apply if the homelessness is not considered to be 'intentional'. Definitions, however, are vague, and interpretations can vary widely or be made on an ad hoc basis. Decisions are often based on available resources, rather than on need. And yet the proportion of the population living as single households has risen dramatically this century - from 7.1% in 1931 to 20% in 1971¹, and probably still higher today. The Government, and Local Authorities, have failed to respond to this change.

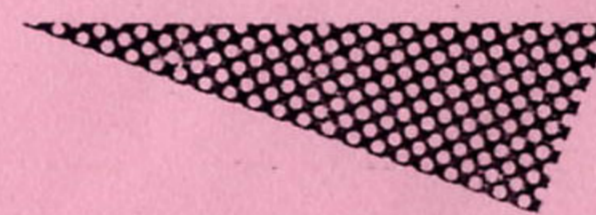
Thus, for the majority of single homeless people, there is **no** statutory right to housing at all. The alternatives are not encouraging. They could try finding a hostel - always supposing they're lucky enough to get into one, as emergency and short stay hostels are seriously overcrowded. They're also generally institutional and lack privacy, and are only a temporary measure; most hostels either don't have access to move-on accommodation, or to only a few nominations. Single homeless people could also try a hotel or lodgings with bed and breakfast; however, recent Government attempts to remove this as an option will drastically worsen the problem. The homeless could also try privately rented flats or buying, but obviously these latter options are out of the range of the majority of young people, who more likely than not, will be unemployed. Finally, the single homeless could try squatting, or staying with friends - or sleeping rough. . .

LENGTH OF STAY AND FOLLOW-ON HOUSING

It is anticipated that residents will stay for a period of between 6 months to 1 year. The hostel workers will advise on housing related issues and will negotiate follow-on housing. The project's residents will probably wish to be rehoused in both self-contained and shared accommodation, thus Stonewall will pursue a range of permanent housing options. Stonewall hopes to be allocated some nominations to housing in Islington, the Borough in which the houses are situated; hopefully, similar arrangements can be made with other Local Authorities. Local housing associations and co-operatives will also be approached for follow-on housing.

THE FUTURE

The two houses have been developed in conjunction with Circle 33 Housing Trust, with whom Stonewall has worked closely on issues of location and design. This relationship is formalised by a Management Agreement. In the longer term, Stonewall hopes to be managing further houses, as the provision of 17 bedspaces cannot hope to meet the urgent need that exists.



NOTES

1. 'Women and Homelessness: An Analysis' A National Cyrenian Report, by Alison Warlow & Maria Spellacy (Leeds Alternative Publications), p. 6.
2. All quotes taken from two London Gay Teenage Group Publications, 'Something to Tell You' by Lorraine Trenchard & Hugh Warren (Trojan Press) pp. 146-7, and 'Talking About Youth Work' (Trojan Press), pp. 12-13.
3. 'Something To Tell You', pp. 31-2.

READING LIST

'Gays and the Law' by Paul Crane (Pluto Press) ISBN 0 86104 386 3.

A comprehensive account of the law on homosexuality in Britain and how it is used against lesbians and gay men. Information and case histories on the effects of the law as it affects personal lives and civil liberty issues.

'Something To Tell You' by Lorraine Trenchard & Hugh Warren for the London Gay Teenage Group (Trojan Press) ISBN 0 9509455 01.

An excellent report on the results of a survey researching the lives and needs of young lesbians and gay men living in London.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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THE STONEWALL SHORT STAY PROJECT

Initially, it is intended that the project shall have 17 bedspaces in two houses in North Islington.

HOUSE NO. 1

This property is situated close to public transport facilities, shops, post office, banks, sports centre and swimming baths. It is a 4 storey property, roughly 230 square metres in area, and is due to be completed and ready for management in autumn 1986. This house is a 9 bed hostel with separate living space for men and women. There is a utility room with washing machine and dryer, communal telephone box, and two kitchen-diners. There is also a staff office and a separate sleep-over space.

HOUSE NO. 2

This house is situated a few streets away, with similar access to the same facilities. It is a 3 storey house which is being converted into 4 self-contained flats to house 8 residents. The house is due to be completed in July 1986. It has a floor area of approximately 198 square metres and includes a one-bedroomed 'mobility' unit suitable for a disabled resident. This property will provide for a more independent lifestyle than the hostel; nevertheless, staff support will be provided by staff working from the other house and from the Stonewall office.

STONEWALL STAFF

Stonewall will be employing 5 hostel workers, who will be responsible for the overall management of the project, as well as for housing management duties. Support of both residents and ex-residents, and the giving of advice and information on welfare, housing and employment issues, will be an integral part of their work. Also vital is liaison with other agencies, both voluntary and statutory, in receiving referrals and arranging follow-on accommodation for the Stonewall residents. The unique nature of the project will require a high level of experience from the hostel workers.

REFERRAL

A number of advice and referral agencies will be working together with Stonewall in the appropriate referral of residents, aged 17-25 years, who are expected to come from all over London. These agencies will be both local organisations and West End agencies, such as the Piccadilly Advice Centre. It is expected that there will be a number of Local Authority referrals as well. Gay organisations involved in advice and support of young people are also likely to be involved in referrals to Stonewall. Both residents and workers will take part in the acceptance of potential residents. Stonewall will reserve half of its bedspaces for women, and a similarly representative number of bedspaces for Black and ethnic minority lesbians and gay men. An Equal Opportunities Policy will apply throughout the organisation from the Management Committee to the residents. The project has a firm commitment to counter racism, heterosexism, sexism and anti-Semitism and a positive policy towards including differently abled people.

In recent years, the extent of homelessness amongst young single people has become a widely publicised cause for concern, and rightly so. However, the needs of women, Black and ethnic minority people, and lesbians and gay men, all of whom are particularly vulnerable to homelessness, tend to be overlooked.

Women's homelessness is very much hidden in our society. Although the numbers involved are largely undocumented, it is known to be a huge problem. There are more single women than single men, and women are less likely to be employed and more likely to have significantly lower wages, thus restricting their access to private renting or buying. There are very few women-only hostels for the homeless, and most women feel uncomfortable and intimidated in mixed hostels.

Black and ethnic minority people bear the brunt of unemployment, and are also much more likely, if employed, to have noticeably lower wages than white people. They have also to contend with racism, both institutionalised and indirect, in attempting to obtain accommodation. They are more likely to be shunted into bed and breakfasts or to the least desirable council estates. Once in these places, or in hostels, they will have to contend with racist abuse and attacks.

These groups of people are evidently under-represented amongst the residents of existing special projects for the homeless. Even so, special projects are only a stop-gap. Through economic and social oppression, they are denied equal access to ordinary, decent housing at a cost they can afford.

Heterosexism is a form of oppression that is very easily hidden and dismissed. Within that context, homelessness is also more of a problem for lesbians and gay men, and it is this last problem that Stonewall is attempting to address in a way that includes women and Black and ethnic minority lesbians and gays.

HOMELESSNESS AMONGST YOUNG LESBIANS AND GAY MEN

"(My mother) said I was evil and acting against God's will and asked me to leave home" (male, 19).

"Mum was upset. My dad kicked me out of the house and disowned me. They feel the same now as when I told them" (female, 18).

Lesbians and gay men generally suffer oppression and discrimination in society, and this is mirrored in the housing market, whether through total lack of employment protection, through harassment and violence, or simply through prejudice preventing access to resources. Furthermore, sexuality is often a direct cause of homelessness. Young lesbians and gay men who have been made homeless due to the hostile reaction of others, whether parents, landlords or employers, constitute a quite separate group of homeless people, with specific needs.

Research in this area is much needed, but what little documentation exists indicates the nature of the problem. A survey by the Gays and Housing Group in 1980-1981 showed that 4,000 people contacting London Gay Switchboard were seeking help with housing problems. Of those actually homeless, 36% reported their housing problem to be related to their sexuality.

"My mother got drunk - tried to beat me up, and my father asked me to leave" (female, 20).

"They threw me out of the house and didn't speak to me for months.

My mother said that she wished she had had a miscarriage whilst carrying me" (male, 20).

The Gays and Housing Group findings are echoed by a research project undertaken in 1983 for the London Gay Teenage Group. Data was collected on a sample survey of nearly 500 young lesbians and gay men living in London. The survey results reflected the extreme difficulty of growing up in a heterosexist and hostile society, revealing the alarming statistic that nearly 1 in 5 (19%) of the survey population had attempted suicide because they were lesbian or gay. The cumulative effects of a negative self-image, problems at school, and overwhelming experience of isolation, intimidation and violence (60% had received verbal abuse, and 20% had been beaten up, because they were lesbian or gay), plus a lack of usual support networks and family rejection, had led to this situation.

"(My parents) were very shocked, called me a lot of unpleasant things, and had me put into care" (female, 18).

"I was thrown out of home. Dad threatened me with a kitchen knife." (male)².

Directly related to the incidence of homelessness amongst young lesbians and gay men, the survey revealed that more than 1 in 10 (11%) of respondents had been thrown out of home because of their sexuality (14.5% of lesbians, and 9% of gay men). Yet it is a common experience of Central London advice agencies that many homeless lesbians and gay men do not wish to enter ordinary emergency or short stay accommodation because of the prejudice and violence they fear they will encounter there. There is, in fact, a high incidence of intimidation and violence directed at young lesbians and gay men in much of the emergency accommodation available for the young single homeless. This is sufficiently well known amongst young lesbians and gay men to discourage them from entering such accommodation, forcing them to seek other, less satisfactory, alternatives. The problem is often compounded by their lack of confidence in feeling able to discuss their housing situation with advice agencies. Their specific housing difficulties thus remain overwhelmingly hidden from society.

From the above-mentioned studies, and from additional case histories contributed by two agencies dealing with single homeless people in London, the following points emerge:

- homelessness amongst young lesbians and gay men is often a direct consequence of the fact that they are gay, and is usually something against which they have no defence as they are unlikely to be old enough or affluent enough to acquire secure accommodation of their own.

- in nearly all the cases cited, homelessness was the only problem these young people had initially - whatever else some of those surveyed became involved with, such as petty crime, drink or drug dependency, or prostitution, was likely to have been a consequence of their homelessness. This is, of course, exacerbated by the difficulty of finding work or claiming supplementary benefit with no permanent address. The recent attempt at DHSS Board and Lodging Regulations, which, if successful, will force young people to constantly move on, can only increase these problems.

- the high incidence of violence in short stay hostels has been mentioned; but even where hostels or advice agencies are not overtly hostile, there is a tendency to see homosexuality as a problem in itself, and to concentrate on this to the exclusion of other factors - such as homelessness! There is also a widespread reluctance amongst hostel workers to take on lesbians and gay men, because of the 'problems' this creates for their heterosexual clients.

A. was thrown out of home by his father for being gay at the age of fifteen. He telephoned a gay counselling service which referred him to a Central London advice centre. This centre sent him to his local Social Services department in the London borough from which he had become homeless. Social Services contacted his father and persuaded him to accept his son back. A. was forced to leave home again after being beaten up by his father and recontacted the gay counselling service. Again he was referred to the same agency, who again referred him to Social Services, who again suggested he return home. Unable to do so because of violence, he became homeless.

B. left a large industrial town in the Midlands after being beaten up in the streets as a known lesbian. She had left a child in care which she said had been taken from her by the courts because she was an 'unfit' mother. Her experiences had made her very mistrustful of non-gay agencies, and she was eventually found bed and breakfast accommodation through a gay information service which in turn contacted an advisory service.

Having been thrown out by his family in the north of England because of his being gay, and having then been beaten up in a local hostel, again because of his gayness, C. came to London. He became aware of the risk of male prostitution for people in his position and was frightened of it as a possibility. Having approached an advice agency he was referred to a nightshelter, which in turn referred him to a commercial hostel. Beaten up by members of staff because he was gay, he was forced to leave. As he now had no money and had become apprehensive of non-gay agencies, he started to pick up men for bed and board.

The need for supportive emergency and short stay accommodation specifically for young lesbians and gay men is clearly demonstrated. Young lesbians and gay men themselves would prefer, in many cases, to be living with other gay people³. So often they have 'escaped' to London from family/community harassment, or fear of harassment. Many young lesbians and gays in London are from small towns or rural communities - many come from Ireland. They see London as being more accepting and anonymous, and are drawn to its large gay community and the prospect of forming a friendship and support network here. Basically, they want to be able to live in peace.

Obviously, Stonewall can only meet part of the need of homeless lesbians and gay men in London; but it was never intended that Stonewall could be the answer to this problem. We are merely one resource, albeit a much-needed one. Currently Stonewall is the only project of its kind in the country - although several other countries have similar schemes. We can only ever be one of a range of options, others of which must be training of hostel workers and positive policies which fight the discrimination and violence in hostels, so that they can become viable alternatives for homeless young lesbians and gay men.