

To whom it may concern

I am writing on behalf of Lesbian Advocacy Services Initiative (LASI) in response to Family Matters: supporting Families in N.I.

I have not addressed the main issues in the consultation document due to time and resource constraints, however we felt it important to flag up an area, where support for families is desperately needed but is currently non-existent in Northern Ireland, which is support for parents and families who have a lesbian, gay or bisexual child. 6% of young people in N.I. are lesbian or gay and people are coming out at a younger and younger age. Having a young person "come out" to the family can be a cause of great concern for families and in some cases lead to family breakdown. Parents have no where to turn for support or for answers, which in turn means that the young person does not get the kind of family support that is needed. The impact of lack of support can be, family tensions and breakdown, the rejection of the young person leading to unsafe or inappropriate behaviours; the young person leaves home earlier than would otherwise have been expected; young people being forced to lead double lives; poor future relationship with the extended family leading to isolation; an ongoing and continued sense of shame for families.

Therefore it is important that this issue is recognised and addressed in any future actions. Resources need to be made available for organisations such as Parents Advice in order that they can provide supports for the families of lgb people. The number of young people in Northern Ireland aged 0-24 who are or will be lesbian or gay is approx. 36,500. If these young people are to enjoy full participation in our society we must begin to address support issues for their families as a matter of urgency.

If you would like to discuss any of the issues raised in this response, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Your Sincerely
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