

CEO's Report:

Since our last annual report, lots has changed at Switchboard. As we continue to face the impact of Covid-19 on our people, our organisation, and the communities we work with I would like to begin by saying just how proud I am to lead such kind, determined and passionate group of people. It is because of all these individuals that we can say, despite the many challenges thrown at us, we have continued to improve, grow, and move closer to our vision of an inclusive and diverse society in which all LGBTQ people can realise their own unique potential.

We've done this by strengthening our organisational foundations in readiness to adapt to emerging needs and grow to meet rising demand. As well as our new Operations and Development Manager, we have welcomed a second staff member to our Older People's Project, Rainbow Café, Communications Team and our Disability Project; thanks to Sussex Community Foundation, The Lottery, and the Tudor Trust respectively. We put resilience and wellbeing and the forefront of our interim strategy, and have launched a new wellbeing offer for staff after listening carefully to what they needed to stay safe, well and fulfilled at work. We've also secured some longer term funding – including a 3 year grant for our Rainbow Café, which was at risk after the Rainbow Fund ceased their legacy programme mentioned in last year's report. Our new operations manager is ensuring our organisation is as cost efficient as it can be while staff have all the tools they need to continue delivering life saving work everyday.

We continued to work well with our existing partners, funders and commissioners; launching a robust report into the impact of Covid-19 on LGBTQ people in Brighton & Hove with the Brighton and Hove City Council and CCG, more than doubling the size of our Disability & Neurodiversity project membership, securing a funding extension with our Social Prescribing partners at Together Co and fielding rising demand for our link work, which now requires a waiting list. Our Older Peoples Project has been as active and vital as ever, and we're making exciting plans for this years' Ageing Well festival. Our Trans and Non-Binary survivors work came to a successful and planned ending in June, with our partners Survivors Network leading on the next phase of this work with our ongoing support.

Lastly, we have continued to seize new opportunities and grow to respond to unmet need. Our new Domestic Violence service is due to open next month, and we are establishing ourselves in both West and East Sussex with our Rainbow Café, Helpline, and an exciting Needs Assessment in the East. We have development plans in place for similar growth in other Switchboard projects too. We have been an intrinsic part of NHS England's new national Rainbow Badge partnership, which is set to grow significantly. We continue to listen to communities, and through our Health & Inclusion Project are driving change across Sussex, with Switchboard services often at the heart of solutions. We've explored future work with MindOut, The Clare Project and other national organisations in the sector. We continue to approach conversations with partners and likeminded organisations in the spirit of collaboration and with a focus on outcomes for the communities we serve.

As restrictions ease we look hopefully toward a return to a 'new normal' and are already delivering a blended offer across most of our services. We have plans to move to a larger space to accommodate our growing team, and to diversify our income streams by building up our training capacity and building stronger relationships with local businesses who share our values and want to support us to achieve our mission.

We'd like to thank all of those who've supported us this year – from those who donated or bought our training packages, to the commissioners and funders who have invested in the future of our communities, and from our fantastic volunteers and trustees to our incredible staff. Thanks also to the LGBTQ people who make Sussex such a great place to be – it's a pleasure to work alongside you and learn from you, Switchboard just wouldn't be the same without you.

2020-21 Our Year at a Glance:

Helpline

As covid-19 hit our helpline adapted to remote delivery overnight. Our volunteers were able to support LGBTQ people from their homes. Our National Emergencies Trust funding enabled us to grow our Helpline and Volunteer Coordinator role, dedicating capacity to a more robust support and safeguarding, an audit of our tech and processes,

and introducing a new reward and recognition offer for volunteers across the organisation. Over the past year we've received over 250 volunteer applications, and have whittled this down to a small but incredible listening team. We're beginning to look into new volunteering roles at Switchboard such as community outreach and fundraising.

The top 5 caller themes in 2020-21 were:

1. Struggling with sexuality
2. General mental health/emotional wellbeing concern
3. Gender identity issues
4. Moving to area advice
5. Requests for info about social groups and activities

Health and Inclusion Project (HIP)

Due to covid-19, HIP had a gap in delivery but came back swinging with a powerful report looking at how the pandemic has affected LGBTQ people in the city. The report was an amalgamation of CCG and Council funding, allowing our HIP Coordinator to focus on one piece of work. This was a huge success with over 600 respondents and we are now dedicating capacity to landing this report across the city, and ensuring meaningful change results from our key findings, which included significant impact in mental health and housing for LGBTQ people, especially young people, trans and non-binary people, and racially marginalised communities. We hope to establish a cross sector LGBTQ conference to keep the conversation going.

Disability & Neurodiversity Project

Our membership has grown from around 200 to over 400 this year, due to the move to online delivery. This has been an important learning for us at Switchboard about accessibility and we are committed to continue offering some online space to our members. We are close to launching a new specialist training module in LGBTQ disability and neurodiversity, and in order to deliver on our goals while coping with rising demand, our funders have increased their support so we can bring a project assistant on board.

Older Peoples Project

Our older people's project had established successful 'satellite' activities in neighbourhoods ahead of the pandemic. In person delivery has had to cease for most of the past year, with online groups and 1 to 1 support and doorstep visits taking precedence. We have brought people together whenever possible, in carefully planned outdoor locations – this has been hugely powerful for many of our members who have struggled with isolation and confidence. We are now building back stronger, with additional funding to introduce an assistant role and enrich the support we can offer older people.

Rainbow Café

The Rainbow Café has had an exciting year with lottery funding enabling us to grow our capacity and our reach to West Sussex, as well as Brighton and Hove. We continue to influence on a local, regional and national level with this work, and are developing specialist LGBTQ dementia training to offer to memory assessment services, care settings, and other professionals who might need it.

Trans and Non-Binary Link

Our trans and non-binary link service has had a successful year supporting communities across Sussex, as agreed early on in the pandemic as the need in wider Sussex was so great. The focus has been on raising awareness of the offer as well as providing support, and this is really paying off. We're also about to launch a vaccine specific support offer for the trans and non-binary community who made need support to get vaccinated.

Grief Encounters

Grief Encounters also made significant adjustments in order to continue offering support throughout the pandemic. We moved temporarily from our peer support courses to one off drop in groups that were easier to access and somewhat lighter in nature in order to hold people safely in an online space. These events have involved poetry, crafts, singing, and self care workshops and have proven very popular. We plan to return to our more involved support in autumn, but we see these sessions as continuing alongside.

Domestic Abuse

We were approached by the Police and Crime Commissioner to explore a domestic abuse service that was 'by and for'

the LGBTQ community. After careful consideration it was decided that Switchboard were well placed to deliver this in partnership with specialist organisations. We look forward to launching the service later this year with 2 LGBTQ IDVA's at the helm.

Training & Inclusion Award

Our training and inclusion award has continued to receive enquiries, and our adapted webinars have been popular. We look forward to growing our training capacity next year and clearing our waiting list of training and award clients. Our involvement in the NHS rainbow badge work has been an exciting part of this journey, giving us a structure to offer support to large hospital trusts while still involving our own training offer, as well as training from other local providers.

Jacob Bayliss

CEO