

GLADD local groups - guidance and information

GLADD local groups are an integral and important part of GLADD, a national organisation which is itself developing and changing. This document is intended for the guidance of GLADD local groups and should be read in conjunction with other material about GLADD. It is not intended to be prescriptive, more to give you some ideas which you might like to think about. Feedback on the value of this guidance will be much appreciated.

What is a GLADD local group?

A GLADD local group is made up of lesbian, gay and bisexual doctors and dentists and students ? people who have common interests and personal experiences. Sharing experiences enables us to give each other a unique quality of mutual support and to pool practical information. Local groups usually have a defined geographical area but any GLADD member should be welcome to participate in your activities.

Presently each local group has at least one volunteer member as co-ordinator. All new members of GLADD, who do not live in London, are added to the local groups database when they join, unless they request otherwise. We aim to send out an update of the local membership list to local co-ordinators on a quarterly basis. If you are planning a local event for the near future, it may be worth asking for an up-to-date copy of the local membership list. We take the confidentiality of membership details very seriously and ask you to treat the local list in strict confidence. We do not give our local contacts' details to new members. You need to contact them.

The current system of handling membership details for local groups is based on the results of a membership survey. We would be interested to hear whether you think there may be a more effective way of introducing new members to their local groups.

Why start a GLADD local group?

Meeting like-minded people is important for most of us. Most of us get to know others as our careers progress but it can take a long time. Forming a GLADD group is one way of speeding this up. If they wish to, groups can also take forward issues very effectively on a local basis within a guidance framework from the national organisation.

What can a GLADD local group do?

All groups can provide friendship and mutual support. Most groups will want to concentrate on social activities; others may wish to campaign locally. GLADD gives these equal priority. Local groups also provide GLADD with new members as well as a mechanism for feeding back membership views to the Executive Committee.

What is expected of a GLADD local group?

All groups are run by and for their members. They are expected to support the aims of GLADD and to conduct their business in a professional way. GLADD expects all of its local groups to meet at least once a year.

Although you will no doubt be happy to let people who are not yet members to come to a meeting before they join GLADD, it is our expectation that people benefiting from your group's activities will join GLADD without undue delay. People who take part in GLADD-organised activities without joining are benefiting from GLADD without paying a membership subscription, which is unfair on those who have joined.

The first steps

Why do you want to start a group?

Think about your personal reasons for starting a group: What do you hope to get out of it? How much time can you give? What would you like a group to do? How does your partner/friends feel about your ideas? Why do you think a local group is helpful? Can you foresee any difficulties in running a group? It's often helpful to discuss these issues before you make any commitment.

Although starting and running a GLADD group can be extremely rewarding, it can also be hard work. Think carefully about this before you start. What is happening in your life/career? Will you be in the same place for long enough to make it worthwhile? Also hearing about difficulties in people's lives, for example, coping with coming out and personal problems, can be very taxing though simply listening to people is often the most valuable help you can give.

Gain local support

GLADD can help publicise your new group to GLADD members. *GLADD-L* provides an easy way to contact many GLADD members by email, but we are also able to do a postal mailshot to members in your area. A small advertisement placed locally will usually generate some enquiries but you would need to include your contact number. It is possible to get free 0870 numbers which you can re-route to your home or mobile. Contact us for more information on this.

Identify aims and share tasks

Groups that are most likely to flourish are those in which tasks and responsibilities are shared between as many members as possible. Although one or two people can do all the work this frequently leads to difficulties when they want to stop. So find others who will help right at the beginning and if you can't find anyone, may be you shouldn't start at all.

The initial meeting/social event enables members to get to know one another. It can also be used to discuss ideas and aims for a group.

Have some clear, agreed procedures

Although there may only be a limited number of people acting as points of contacts for the local groups, it is important that the task of organising events and activities for the group does not just fall on one pair of shoulders. We anticipate that this work will be shared as much as possible among the local group members. Larger groups may wish to organise themselves on a more formal basis and have a chairperson and a secretary. It is not expected that the business of local groups should be too formal.

Please also do let the GLADD Executive Committee know how you are getting on and please ask for help and advice.

Holding meetings

Think about where your group may wish to meet. Your group may feel most comfortable meeting in a member's home, at least initially, although this is reliant on a member being willing to host such a meeting. Other groups may wish to meet in a local lesbian/gay-friendly venue, but remember that some members of the group may not feel comfortable meeting in such establishments. Equally, meeting publicly as a lesbian/gay group in a non-lesbian/gay venue may not appeal to everyone.

Ensure that new members are made particularly welcome and there is the opportunity for them to mix and chat to others. This is extremely important as for some this may be the first occasion that they have acknowledged their sexuality publicly. It is important to try to attract both men and women to the events and we have found that the best way to do this is to try to ensure that there is a (publicised) male and female organiser of each event.

When people meet, friendships are formed, support given and received and ideas are generated almost without any effort. Most local groups therefore base their activities around meetings and the group itself should decide how these should be organised. Whether you prefer a formal or informal style, remember you are members of a professional organisation and being professional about how you arrange your business is very important.

A programme of activities

Your group may not have the time, volunteers, or need for sophisticated events. Simply enabling lesbian, gay and bisexual doctors, dentists and students to meet together as a group is providing the most important role of a local group.

Different local groups will have different needs and will want to meet at different frequencies.

It takes time to establish a group. Do not expect too much too soon. Learn from mistakes and be pleased with all results. If attendance is poor think of possible reasons for this, tackle them and be pleased that some people, however small a number, are getting together.

We think you don't need much advice about organising social activities but remember that not everyone enjoys the same things that you do. Social events don't always have to be in a gay/lesbian club and as a group you may be able to have as much fun in other places.

Forward planning is important but don't be over-ambitious. Let the group grow slowly and securely. If you have the resources (members' voluntary time mostly) a varied programme of activities may meet the needs of more members. If a programme of activities is available, send this programme to members and other enquirers.

Problems you may encounter

We hope of course that everything will be completely plain sailing but perhaps that's a bit unlikely. Most commonly problems centre around too few people trying to do too much and getting demoralised. Other difficulties commonly arise because of personality clashes and money. There is nothing abnormal about such problems; they are almost inevitable in voluntary groups but they need sorting out carefully and quickly. There is no formula that will prevent such problems and experience is a very good if demanding teacher. The national executive may be able to help and give further guidance about difficulties but don't leave it too late.

Sexual harassment

The GLADD Executive Committee feels very strongly that all members should be free from sexual harassment when participating in GLADD activities. Any member (or non-member) who mis-uses GLADD in this way should be counselled and, if the behaviour continues, should be excluded from meetings and the national executive informed. The same applies to other forms of anti-social behaviour such as drunkenness. Please do contact the Executive Committee for advice about this.

Confidentiality

Some members of GLADD are 'out' to their families, friends and colleagues. However, some members are very concerned that their membership of GLADD should be kept confidential and some who wish to join have not done so because they fear the consequences of disclosure of their sexuality.

All members should respect treat information about any other member as being confidential unless that member has given permission for information about them to be passed on. Never assume that someone else is as 'out' as you are.

GLADD itself maintains its membership list under the terms of the Data Protection Act and the membership list is never released to any other individual or organisation.

How GLADD can help you

Here are a few ways we can help:

We can provide GLADD posters which you can amend to advertise your group.

We can help you get a free 0870 number to use as a contact.

Funds are available to help establish GLADD local groups, but please discuss your needs first with the Hon. Treasurer before committing yourself to expenditure.

We can organise a postal mailshot to your members.

We can provide advice and support.

GLADD Executive Committee - February 2001.