



Partnership Evaluation
June 2025



LGBT Health and Wellbeing is Scotland's health and wellbeing charity for LGBTQ+ adults. Our vision is of a Scotland where LGBTQ+ people thrive; an equal Scotland where who we are does not negatively impact on our health and wellbeing. We will achieve this by improving the physical, social, and mental health and wellbeing of LGBTQ+ adults (16+) in Scotland through responsive support services, opportunities for our community to connect with each other, and supporting mainstream services to be more inclusive.

We welcome the entire diversity of our LGBT+ community including non-binary, queer, intersex, asexual people and all identities under the LGBTQIA+ umbrella.



See Me is the national programme to end mental health stigma and discrimination in Scotland. Guided and supported by people with experience of mental health problems, See Me takes an intersectional whole system approach to challenging mental health stigma and discrimination. The programme aims to influence changes in attitudes, behaviours, cultures and systems so that people with experience of mental health problems are respected, valued and empowered to achieve outcomes important to them. A priority for the programme is to better understand and address the mental health stigma that is disproportionately experienced by particular groups of people in Scotland.

Contents

Glossary of terms	Page 4
Background	Page 5
Aims	Page 6
Evaluation - methods	Page 7
Timeline	Page 8
Community Champions Model	Page 9
Champions' Development	Page 10
See Me Proud Champions	Page 11
Champions' Knowledge	Page 12
Champions' Skills and Confidence	Page 13
Influencing Community	Page 14
Community Connections	Page 15
Intersectional Working	Page 16
Community Resources	Page 17
#SeeMeProud	Page 18
Influencing Policy and Leadership	Page 19
Influencing Health and Social Care	Page 20
Empowering Champions	Page 21
A Champion's Reflections	Page 22
Personal Influence on Champions	Page 23
Influencing Partners	Page 24
Challenges and Learning	Page 25
Conclusions	Page 27

Glossary of terms

Discrimination: When a person performs an action, whether intentional or unintentional, that creates barriers and inequality for people with experience of mental health problems.

Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA): A human rights based approach empowers people by helping them to understand and claim their rights, and by increasing the ability and accountability of individuals and institutions who are responsible for respecting, protecting and fulfilling these rights. We work to embed the PANEL principles in our work and to support implementation of rightsbased approaches in practice and system improvement activity.

Intersectionality: Systematic patterns of interrelated stigma and discrimination that people face due to aspects of their identities or social circumstances, such as race, ethnicity, economic status, gender, age, sexual orientation or disability.

LGBTQIA+ is an abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, asexual and more. These terms are used to describe a person's sexual orientation or gender identity. This abbreviation is commonly shortened to **LGBTQ+** or **LGBT+**. **LGBT+** is the term used most commonly by project partner LGBT Health and Wellbeing, and is therefore the term used within this document, outside of quotes or references from other sources (in which case the term used within the original source is used).

Mental health An umbrella term to refer to both the concepts of mental health problems and mental wellbeing.

Mental health problems These include problems experienced as part of everyday life to serious long-term conditions. They are defined as a range of symptoms that meet the criteria for clinical diagnosis. Examples include common mental health problems such as depression and anxiety, and severe, mental health problems such as schizophrenia. The term is often used interchangeably with mental health, negative mental health, mental illness, mental ill health and mental distress.

Social contact aims to challenge stigmatizing attitudes through planned interactions between people who have direct experience of mental health problems, stigma and discrimination and those who might not have these experiences – particularly members of target groups like employers, education professionals and healthcare workers. Social contact appears to be effective in changing attitudes even in those who hold the most stigmatising views, and should be targeted, local, credible and continuous. Social contact is ineffective when a power imbalance exists between members of the stigmatised and stigmatising groups

Stigma: A social process that involves the damaging labelling, stereotyping and exclusion of individuals or groups based on perceived differences that deviate from dominant social norms.

Social movement: Social movements have been used to challenge health and social inequalities affecting disadvantaged individuals, groups and communities. They are often called different things, including collective action, community empowerment and social innovation, but they all have the intention of challenging inequality, exclusion and injustice to complex social problems.

Background

LGBT Health and Wellbeing (LGBT HWB) is a unique community initiative that promotes the health, wellbeing and equality of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in Scotland. The organisation was set up in 2003 to promote the health, wellbeing and equality of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in Scotland. It provides support, services and information to improve health and wellbeing, reduce social isolation and stimulate community development and volunteering.

Research consistently shows that LGBT+ people are at a higher risk for various mental health problems. Depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and suicidality are notably more prevalent within LGBT+ communities. Studies suggest that these disparities are due to external factors that create a hostile and stressful environment for LGBT+ individuals. The Mental Welfare Commission Scotland – LGBT Mental Health Report (2017) highlighted that compared to most people who access mental health services, LGBT people are much more likely to have experienced:

- Bullying and name calling at school
- Hostility or rejection by family
- Danger of violence in public places
- Rejection by some religions
- Harassment
- Casual homophobic/biphobic/transphobic comments
- Negative experiences of healthcare professionals

One of the primary contributors to mental health issues among LGBT+ individuals is the pervasive discrimination and stigma they face. This discrimination can be explicit, such as verbal and physical abuse, or more subtle, such as microaggressions and social exclusion. The fear and experience of discrimination can lead to chronic stress, known as minority stress, which significantly impacts mental well-being.

To address these issues, See Me and LGBT Health & Wellbeing worked in partnership from 2017 to 2024 on a project entitled See Me Proud (SMP). The partnership brought together See Me's expert knowledge of mental health stigma and discrimination and what works and LGBT Health & Wellbeing's expert knowledge of the LGBT sector to tackle mental health-related stigma and discrimination within LGBT+ communities in Scotland. Initially funded for three years, See Me Proud received additional funding in 2020 enabling See Me to build on the previous three year partnership with LGBT Health & Wellbeing, supporting them to embed and sustain work across their organisation and in the LGBT community to end mental health stigma and discrimination.

Project Aims

The See Me Proud project aimed to contribute to See Me's programme outcomes (particularly outcomes 1-4; see below). More specifically, it aimed to **tackle mental health stigma and discrimination within LGBT communities** and **reduce the multiple stigma and discrimination experienced by LGBT people more widely within communities and key settings**. The project sought to achieve these outcomes using a Community Champions model to achieve three overarching objectives:

- ➔ **To facilitate a growing movement of change that tackles overall mental health stigma and discrimination**
- ➔ **To support champions that want to influence change especially around people's experience of community settings and within health and social care.**
- ➔ **To link into See Me's wider social movement, especially around intersectional issues and capacity building in regards to LGBT+ issues.**

To do this, See Me supported LGBT Health and Wellbeing to recruit and train LGBT community champions, who would raise awareness of mental health stigma and discrimination within their communities and wider society. Through training and support, the project aimed to create a network of confident, skilled and knowledgeable See Me Proud Champions who could speak openly about their mental health, and felt empowered to challenge stigma and discrimination within their communities.

See Me programme outcomes, from their 2021-26 strategy, With Fairness in Mind.

- 1 People in the populations we target feel confident to talk about their mental health and their experience of stigma and discrimination.
- 2 People in the populations we target feel confident to have conversations with other people who are experiencing poor mental health.
- 3 People with experience of mental health problems feel more confident to challenge mental health stigma and discrimination.
- 4 People in the settings we work in recognise mental health stigma and discrimination, know how to challenge and take action against it.
- 5 Leaders in key settings and organisations create inclusive cultures and take action to tackle mental health stigma and discrimination.
- 6 National and local policy and decision makers resource, design and implement policies, systems and services that explicitly reduce mental health stigma and address discrimination.

Evaluation - methods

This report outlines the findings of the Mental Health Foundation's summative evaluation of this partnership following its completion in 2024. The Mental Health Foundation (MHF) research and evaluation team conducted a qualitative thematic analysis of primary and secondary analysis of data from across the six years of the partnership. The MHF team met with See Me Proud project workers and volunteers from See Me and LGBT Health and Wellbeing (LGBT HWB) to review sources of secondary data, and develop a timeline of key activities during the project. Secondary data sources included annual and quarterly reports, presentations, and focus group and interview transcripts from earlier evaluations of the See Me Proud project. Gaps in the data were identified during this meeting. To fill these gaps, project workers mined their archives, and new primary data was collected in the form of four new interviews conducted by the See Me Proud Development Worker with See Me Proud volunteers.

The evaluation seeks to answer the following questions:

- Did the See Me Proud project meet its objectives, as described on the previous page?
- What See Me project outcomes did the See Me Proud project contribute to?
- What is the evidence that the See Me Proud project developed a network of Community Champions who have the confidence, skills and knowledge to speak openly about their mental health and tackle stigma and discrimination in their communities?
- What is the evidence that the See Me Proud project influenced how LGBT+ communities in Scotland think about mental health stigma and discrimination?



Artwork to challenge mental health stigma created by a See Me Proud Champion, created during the Champion's induction training, 2018

Timeline

2017

See Me Proud

See Me Proud was established as a programme of work at LGBT Health and Wellbeing in 2017, marking the start of the formal partnership between See Me and LGBT Health and Wellbeing.



Jan 2018

First funding received

See Me Proud received its first funding in January 2018. The team spent time consulting with the LGBT+ community, and developing the programme and resources.



2019

Community work begins

- Edinburgh Pride Mardis Gras
- Proud to Walk A Mile event
- National Conversation event
- Co-hosted MH Shorts Series with SQIFF
- Podcast for LGBT writing month



Nov 2018

First cohort trained

Recruitment for See Me Proud champions began in August 2018, with 17 applications received. The first cohort completed their induction in Nov '18.



2020

Covid brings changes

- 11 Champions trained
- Champion became trustee at LGBT HWB
- Lockdown social events:
 - Not in the Pub Quiz
 - Lockdown Big Queer Book Quiz
- Pen pals scheme
- Video with Scottish Trans Alliance
- Lockdown project for Time to Talk Day



2021

Covid impact continues

- Glasgow Zine Fest
- Review of champions training
- Change of staff at LGBT HWB
- New project agreement signed



Phase 1

Phase 2

Feb 2022

4th cohort recruited

8 new champions join the programme



2022

A creative approach

- Graphic novel produced
- Distribution of zines at Glasgow Zine Fair
- Embedded anti-stigma approach in Equality Network Community Support



2023

Community connections

- Time to Talk Day zine workshop
- Royal College of Psychiatrists workshop
- Open mic night
- Forth Valley College LGBT network project
- Partnership with LGBT Health refugee project
- Gourrock Highland Games
- Hwupenyu stigma sessions
- Pride
- Puppet workshop
- Zines for Teens workshop



2024

Partnership ends

- Local policy influencing, Falkirk
- Workshops for healthcare professionals on LGBT asylum seekers
- Time to Talk Day 2024
- Anti-stigma poetry workshop
- See Me impact event



Community Champions Model

The Community Champions Model is a robust framework designed to empower local leaders and community members to drive sustainable development and social change. It focuses on identifying, nurturing, and supporting individuals who exhibit the potential to become catalysts for positive transformation within their communities. The model is rooted in the belief that communities are best positioned to understand and address their own needs. By leveraging the inherent strengths, knowledge, and resources within a community, the Community Champions Model aims to create a more sustainable and impactful approach to development.

See Me Community Champions

As part of See Me's See Us movement for change, volunteer Community Champions were recruited to help raise awareness of - and take action against - mental health stigma and discrimination within their communities and wider society. See Me Community Champions were trained in community development and participative practice, and gained knowledge on how to design and run anti-stigma projects. Champions then took action in a variety of ways, helping to ensure that mental health spaces are safe, and understanding and validating people within the community, and their unique experiences.

See Me Proud Champions

See Me supported LGBT Health and Wellbeing to recruit and train LGBT+ community champions, based on this model. Through training and support, the project aimed to create a network of confident, skilled and knowledgeable See Me Proud Champions who could **speak openly about their mental health, and feel empowered to assert their rights, challenge stigma and discrimination experienced by their communities, and inspire others to do so too.**



Community Champions training, November 2018

Champions' Development

August 2018

See Me Proud
Community Discussion

A community discussion evening was held as an initial engagement event. This took the format of a panel discussion about tackling stigma and discrimination around mental health.

Existing See Me Champions recruitment and training materials reviewed by working group, and amended to be more LGBT+ inclusive

September 2018

Working group established

October 2018

See Me Proud Recruitment
Information day

The recruitment drive for LGBT+ community champions was a success, resulting in 17 applications and exceeding initial expectations.

Joint delivery of the first cohort of training upskilled the LGBT Health and Wellbeing Development Worker to lead on future training.

November 2018

9 Champions trained

June 2019

3 Champions trained

Following feedback from cohort 1, a new section was added to the training, focusing on the issues that LGBT+ people experience around mental health.

Training was co-delivered with existing Community Champions. Feedback from participants showed sharing lived experiences helped bring the training to life.

February 2020

3 Champions trained

2022

8 Champions trained

Training was conducted over three sessions, focusing on the See Me Movement for Change (See Us), self-care and sustainability, using lived experience and project planning

By the end of the project, a total of 23 See Me Proud Champions had undertaken the training, with between 6 and 15 Champions active at any one time.

April 2024

Project End



See Me Proud Champions completing their training in 2019

“Great two days of training, it was engaging and it was a good opportunity for us to make our own plan of actions for the project.”

23
Champions
Trained

See Me Proud Champions

The project aimed to create a network of confident, skilled and knowledgeable Champions by:

- **Providing bespoke Champions induction training**, covering topics from the See Me Champions training such as community development, alongside LGBT-specific topics. To do this, Champions training was developed in consultation with LGBT community members, and further adapted in response to feedback by Champions.
- **Supporting Champions to deliver training**: Some See Me Proud Champions received facilitation training, and went on to help run the training for new cohorts of Champions.
- **Facilitating regular Champions group meetings**, to facilitate group planning and promote a culture of peer support.
- **Developing a flexible and responsive training programme** comprised of bespoke and standard See Me training sessions covering topics such as sharing your voice in the media, social media, project planning, community mapping and managing disclosures, based on the identified training needs of the Champions.
- Encouraging Champions to develop their own **peer support spaces**
- **Employing a See Me Proud development worker** 7 hours per week to support champions and coordinate the project.

Champions' Training

Initially setting out to recruit 10-12 volunteers in year one of the project, a total of 23 community champions were trained during See Me Proud, exceeding expectations particularly in the early stages. An evaluation after the first two years of the partnership demonstrated the success of the training approach. Feedback from Champions was positive, as in the example on the right, and suggestions for improvement were used to tailor the training further. Demonstrating the success of the training, following their induction some Champions expressed an interest in running training themselves. They were supported to develop facilitation skills and practical experience by facilitating Champions training for later cohorts. Reflecting on the experience of co-facilitating the training, the See Me Proud Development Worker stated in the annual report that:

"I just remember it just being so fun and funny. I laughed for a good six hours, because the group that had come together, we all had different life experience, difference lived experience, and we were just all joined by a common goal. "

SMP Champion

"Co-delivering the training with existing Community Champions brought the See Me Proud Project to life, as they share their experiences and opportunities they have had to help with contributing towards ending stigma and discrimination around mental health within the LGBT community. Opportunities for peer support and connection between champions has been a vital part of supporting new champions." Annual Report 2019-20

The following section explores the impact of these actions on Champions, including their knowledge, skills and confidence, before exploring the wider impact on LGBT+ communities.

Champions' Knowledge

Champions feel an increased understanding of stigma and discrimination and a human rights based approach

Within the data, there were clear examples demonstrating that champions felt their knowledge and understanding of stigma and discrimination had increased as a result of being involved with See Me Proud. A survey completed by See Me Proud Champions in 2023 showed that:

83%

felt they had developed new skills

68%

gained in confidence and self esteem

83%

believed they had utilised skills that are of benefit to the project

"I enjoyed learning the structural ways of tackling stigma and discrimination by applying proper human rights procedures" SMP Champion

Champions who participated in focus groups and interviews during an earlier evaluation of the project spoke about how the training that they received helped them understand more about how they had been treated in the past. They reflected widely on their own experiences of stigma and discrimination, and those of people around them. Champions recognised that their understanding of these experiences changed as a result of their improved understanding of the systemic and intersectional nature of stigma, the different forms it can take, and how it can impact upon mental health and a person's sense of identity.

"I'd never really addressed the duality of my identities - being LGBT and suffering or living with depression and anxiety. Then being a part of this group has made me realise how they intertwine and how so much of what I experienced...has impacted my mental health. Just having a forum and a group that we can chat about that has been really important for me because ...not a lot of us talk very openly about our mental health. I think it's really encouraged me to do it and then them seeing me do it; they've started to talk to me about their own as well."

SMP Champion

"The SMP training gave me much more awareness of the impacts of self-stigma, and allowed me to realise that experiences I have had in the past had been cases of indirect discrimination. It made me more aware of this, as I previously believed I hadn't experienced much discrimination."

SMP Champion

Champions' Confidence & Skills

**See Me Outcome 1:
People in the populations
we target feel
confident to talk openly
about their mental health
and their experience of
stigma and discrimination**

Closely linked with See Me's programme Outcome 1, the See Me Proud project aimed to support the development of a network of Champions who feel they have the confidence and skills to speak openly about their mental health and issues that affect them.

The data reviewed for this evaluation provided many examples of how this objective was met by the project. See Me Proud Champions spoke consistently about their growing confidence to talk openly about their mental health, and the key role played by See Me Proud in this. Some Champions spoke about how it is easier to talk about mental health in the context of See Me Proud, acting as a starting point for anti-stigma conversations. One Champion cited an example of being in a taxi in Glasgow, where upon mentioning her work on her graphic novel, and the content of her work, the taxi driver proceeded to tell her about his own experiences of trauma and mental health. This example was shared by the Champion to demonstrate their growing confidence in sharing their story, and the benefits that doing so can have for others. The Champion also noted that the taxi driver "really needed someone to talk to, and there's not enough support for people once they do decide they're ready to talk about their mental health." This emphasises the continued need for anti-stigma work around mental health, and highlights the power lived experience can have in reducing stigma. It also serves as a reminder however of the importance of equipping people with lived experience with the knowledge and skills they need not only to talk confidently about their own mental health, but also to safely hear the experiences of others, and to navigate any psychological impacts this might bring.

Champions spoke of how being Part of See Me Proud has built their confidence by increasing their sense of legitimacy and providing more weight to the messages that they were conveying. For many, a key component of feeling confident to speak openly was the support that they felt they received, both from the project partners, and from peers. See Me Proud Champions developed a strong peer support network through the project. Monthly Champions meetings, supported by the Development Worker, provide a safe space for members to share and support each other. A private Facebook page and WhatsApp group facilitated communication between meetings, enhancing the beneficial impact on members. These regular meetings and safe spaces provided people with the opportunity to experience both being supported and supporting others to talk openly about their mental health.

"I think for me it's creating that social group, especially on the Facebook group, where we can actually express what is actually going on and then having people around us...supporting, giving that support ...without such a group it would have been difficult for someone like me to kind of relate the way I feel and stuff going on myself" SMP Champion

"We've all came together, became a peer support group and all became more comfortable to share our stories." SMP Champion

Influencing Community



Aim: To facilitate a growing movement of change that tackles overall mental health stigma & discrimination

See Me Proud employed a model of social contact with Community Champions to facilitate change within the LGBT+ and wider communities. Between 2019 and 2024, See Me Proud Champions volunteered over **1568** hours of their time. They developed, delivered and contributed to more than **59 events**, many of which are listed on the timeline of community events shown around this page. Community events provided opportunities for Champions to engage directly with more than **2100** members of LGBT+ communities, professional bodies and the wider public, to open up conversations about mental health, in line with **See Me Outcomes 2 and 3: People in the populations we target feel confident to have conversations with other people who are experiencing poor mental health who in turn feel more confident to challenge mental health stigma and discrimination**

Evidence from the See Me Proud annual reports and event reports such as the National Conversation report demonstrate the impact that Champions had by contributing to this broad variety of national and local events. A survey of LGBT+ community members who attended events in 2024 showed that after engaging with the Champions, respondents were:

- **More aware of mental health services: 72%**
- **Better equipped to support others: 67%**
- **Better able to speak about their own mental health: 73%**

Community Connections

One clear example of the impact of community engagement and how this approach contributes to achieving the project outcomes can be seen through the Champions' attendance at five Pride events across Scotland during the course of the project, as demonstrated by the following excerpt taken from See Me Proud's annual report 2019-2020.

"The Champions developed a 'Rainbow Wall' as a method of capturing people's views and opening up conversations during the events. Every colour on the Rainbow Wall represents a question, some of the questions are light-hearted and fun, whilst others are deeper, asking how people feel about their identity and mental health. Engaging in the Rainbow Wall activity encouraged Pride attendees to connect with See Me Proud Champions and provided members of the LGBTQ+ community with an opportunity to express how they feel, whilst remaining anonymous. Collated responses helped See Me Proud to learn more about what people think around mental health within the community. We learnt more about the issues faced by LGBTQ+ people when it comes to opening up about mental health in order to influence our approach to engagement.

The 'selfie frame' was a good opportunity for participants to share their lived experience around their mental health. One example was a participant came along to the See Me Stall and took the 'selfie frame' they then openly spoke to one of the community champions about this was their first time at Pride, they felt really overwhelmed by the amount of people and the noise surrounding them...one of the Champions saw that they looked quite distressed, so they took them to a quieter space in the venue, and spent some time just listening and reassuring the participant. [They] gave them mental health resources to let them know there are services available to them.

From our engagement at Free Pride – we were approached by SQIFF (Scottish Queer International Film Festival) ... they have been following See Me Proud on Facebook and Twitter and were impressed by the awareness raising that the champions have been doing, they asked if See Me Proud would co-host: Mental Health Shorts in October."



Selfie frame (top) and rainbow wall (bottom) at a Pride event, 2019

Rainbow Wall Response Themes

Champions collected 256 responses to six questions using their Rainbow Wall at two Pride events in 2019. Here are the themes from two of the key questions:

What makes it difficult for you to talk about your mental health?

- Stigma and discrimination
- Judgement or fear of reactions
- Pressure and expectations
- Lack of understanding and awareness
- Feeling unworthy or less than
- Cultural and religious barriers
- Difficulty in expressing

What do you need in order to be proud of your identity?

- Support and acceptance
- Respect and understanding
- Visibility and representation
- Safe spaces
- Self belief and confidence
- Community and peer support

Intersectional working

Aim: To link into See Me's wider social movement, especially around intersectional issues and capacity building in regards to LGBT+ issues, contributing to See Me Outcome 4: People in the settings we work in recognise mental health stigma and discrimination, know how to challenge and take action against it

Working with LGBT+ New Scots

See Me Proud undertook several projects addressing intersectional stigma, including projects focused on stigma and age, and racism focused work with [Hwupenyu](#). One example of community engagement and intersectional working can be seen in See Me Proud's work with LGBT+ New Scots. See Me Proud and LGBT Health and Wellbeing collaborated on an information session delivered to New Scots who are community members with the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Project at LGBT Health and Wellbeing. 46 LGBT+ asylum seekers attended a 1-hour information session and discussion, focused on stigma around mental health specific to refugee and asylum seeker communities.

Impact: 100% of session participants who completed feedback forms, or gave verbal feedback said that the event made them feel more confident talking about mental health and more aware of their support options. The success of the participation during the session demonstrates the meaningful community engagement approach of LGBT Health and Wellbeing. The session gave good insight into various intersecting issues faced by participants. These included:

- NHS services not being accessible, difficulties with language barriers, as well as long waitlists and lack of information about medications.
- Mental health difficulties only being associated with people who may have long term and enduring mental health conditions and are secluded from society.
- Fear that discussing mental health will be detrimental to their asylum claim.
- Fear of discussing sexuality with professionals due to negative and dangerous past experiences.

An infographic created following the session helped stimulate conversations and meetings across the team. The data was embedded into a variety of workshops within Higher Education and Community settings. The project successfully demonstrated how using a culturally appropriate, peer led approach can result in a deeper understanding of the intersectional stigmas impacting the group. This in turn has resulted in closer partnership working and greater accessibility and shared understanding within sessions.

500%

Refugees and asylum seekers are 500% more likely to experience mental health issues than the general population

(Refugee Council, 2022)

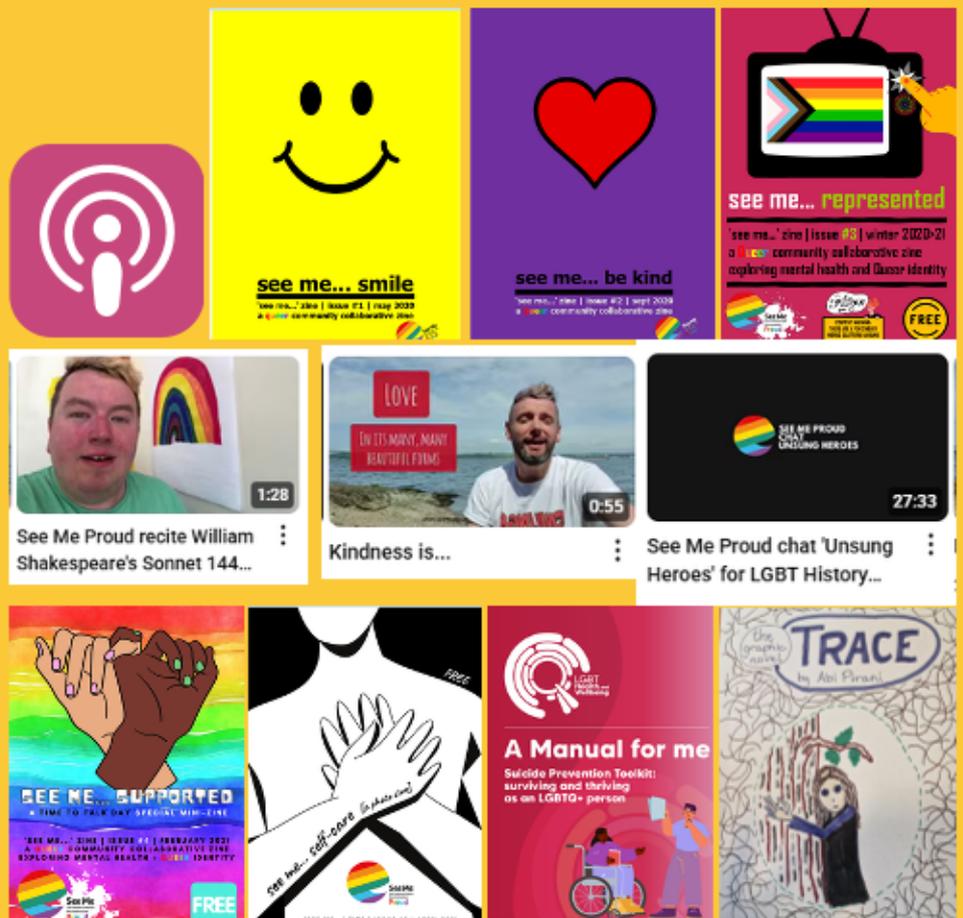
"The community members enjoyed the session and left satisfied with what they had received. They are eager to engage in future sessions and put what they have received into practice. Because mental health is taboo in ethnic communities, they were happy to receive first-hand information on how to look after themselves and peer support their relatives and friends."

Staff Member from support service.

Community Resources

During the project, See Me Proud Champions created and co-designed a range of digital and physical resources including zines, toolkits, graphic novels, podcasts and videos designed to engage LGBT+ communities in the topic on mental health. The resources have been widely shared and promoted by See Me Proud Champions, partners and others. Resources have been used as ways to open conversations about mental health, educate people about mental health and LGBT+ issues, and help leave a lasting legacy of See Me Proud. Click on each picture for a link to the resources.

“I’ve loved the people that I’ve been able to meet, but it’s the end results that are the best part. Seeing the toolkit and the impact it has on students here is fantastic, and knowing they’ve got a resource that speaks to them really makes a difference.”
SMP Champion



See Me Proud Champion Abi created a graphic novel called Trace, about adverse childhood experiences. The graphic novel was incorporated into a See Me Anti-Stigma Arts Funded project in 2024. Say Women chose to use the novel due to its resonance with the participant's own experiences and contexts.

See Me Proud Champion Abi showcasing their work including their graphic novel Trace and their puppets, at a ComiCon event in June 2024.

#See Me Proud

See Me Proud champions identified social media as an important platform for connecting with LGBT+ communities, increasing social contact-based work, and growing the wider See Me social movement for change to tackle mental health stigma and discrimination. To support this in the first year of the project, See Me Proud Champions created a brand (See Me Proud), and established profiles on Facebook, Instagram and X (Twitter). Two Champions took responsibility for updating these pages, ensuring there were posts relating to upcoming events, as well as regular and timely updates to tie in with other LGBT+ and mental health-related events.

Social media proved a crucial platform for reaching people during the Covid-19 pandemic, and a positive way of deepening engagement with event attendees. Promotional work on social media was successful in engaging other organisations working this space, for example the manager of the Scottish Queer International Film Festival (SQUIFF) followed See Me Proud's social media accounts and was impressed by the awareness raising that the champions had been doing. The manager consequently asked if See Me Proud would co-host: Mental Health Shorts in October.

However, the success of this strategy was mixed. Towards the end of the project, it was recognised that many LGBT+ people were experiencing a growing level of stigma and discrimination (both direct and indirect) online, making it a less safe or appropriate platform:

"We had hoped to put a focus on social media (e.g. TikTok) this year to promote the importance of talking about your mental health and reduce the stigma, however it has been a challenging year for many LGBTQ+ people and many have been actively avoiding social media due to the negative rhetoric around trans rights, anti-immigration, and other hard, right-wing views." See Me Proud report, 2022-2023



671 Followers

631 Posts



655 Followers

x Posts



500 Followers

61 Posts

"#seemeproud #wellproud these awesome incredible folk make me proud as well! Proud to be doing great work and proud to be around such positivity after the last few days! Happy pride everyone, I'm proud of you!" X post



Influencing Policy & Leadership

See Me Outcome 6: National and local policy and decision makers resource, design and implement policies, systems and services that explicitly reduce mental health stigma and address discrimination

Outcome 5: Leaders in key settings and organisations create inclusive cultures and take action to tackle mental health stigma and discrimination

Aligned with See Me's overarching outcomes, policy and leadership work has been woven into the partnership between See Me and LGBT Health & Wellbeing, with the aim that champions:

- **feel empowered to assert their rights and inspire others to do so too**
- **have the opportunity to engage with key influencers and leaders to support work that reduces mental health stigma and addresses discrimination.**

See Me Proud Champions spoke of how the training that they received to become a champion had helped them reflect on past experiences and better recognise stigma and discrimination directed against them, and the impact that this had on them, for example in perpetuating self-stigma.

Reflecting on past experiences helped Champions feel more confident that they could recognise stigma and discrimination in the future. Alongside training on human rights, and a sense gained through the project of collective action, this helped increase Champions' confidence in their ability to uphold their rights and challenge others. For some, this fit into a valued sense of identity as an activist.

One Champion highlighted the added value of working in partnership with organisations well known in the field. It was felt that this collaboration can provide a level of validity and integrity to an individual activist when making an argument.

"Having an organisation behind you takes you from being just someone on their soapbox to someone that is actually going to be listened to. Instead of you just 'complaining' and pushing your agenda, they want to listen, so it's helped me gain traction with anti-stigma and LGBT+ work too." SMP Champion

Champions identified policy work as an effective method of engaging with others on the topic of mental health and LGBT-related stigma and rights. One described their involvement with supporting policy changes in local government around improved outcomes for LGBT people, which has involved speaking with local councillors about the impact of stigma on local LGBT+ people.

"The See Me Proud training... allowed me to realise that experiences I have had in the past had been cases of indirect discrimination. It made me more aware of this, as I previously believed I hadn't experienced much discrimination." SMP Champion

"I feel like I've found my voice and place as an activist. I've found my identity as an activist."
SMP Champion

"I've been involved with policy work at local levels, charities and groups, talking about LGBT+ issues and stigma. I have been speaking at upper management meetings, being brought in to answer impact questions as well as local authority meetings and policy work." SMP Champion

Influencing Health & Social Care

To support champions that want to influence change especially around people's experience of community settings and within health and social care

The National Conversation Around Mental Health, held early in the See Me Proud project, identified mental health services as a key setting in which to tackle stigma and discrimination.

In 2022, See Me Proud aimed to recruit ten new See Me Proud Champions with a specific focus on tackling stigma in mental health services. Whilst the team were successful in recruiting new Champions, the Covid-19 pandemic then struck, hugely limiting the work that could be done within health and social care settings. The See Me Development Worker reflected,

“Initially one of our objectives was to reach out to Health & Social Care settings to establish opportunities for champions to speak with the staff, however the COVID restrictions/mitigations in many of these settings – coupled with pressures on the NHS etc – prevented us from doing this.”

Despite this, the project did manage to work in health and social care settings, hosting workshops for mental health professionals, and reviewing resources for social care settings such as a Self Directed Support toolkit with the Alliance.

Royal College of Psychiatrists Anti-Stigma Workshop

One of the Champions worked with See Me to present at this conference which focused on the impact of stigma in psychiatry and the ways in which this can be dismantled. The champion ran a session focused on their lived experience which they said was a great chance to share their insights and directly impact the way in which stigma is tackled in mental health services.

National Conversation Around Mental Health

The National Conversation on Mental Health was a collaboration between a number of LGBT Health and Wellbeing Projects, hosting three events over a day to allow community members and mental health services to discuss access for services for LGBTQ people.

The day consisted of a brunch event with informal round table discussions facilitated by staff and See Me Proud Champions to get stories from community members about their experiences of accessing mental health services and ideas to improve access for LGBT people.

Two Community Champions were part of the panel discussion to share their lived experience around their mental health and being LGBT.

During the event, participants shared their experiences with services, highlighting issues such as long waiting times, the importance of a 'whole person' approach in therapy, and the need for awareness of structural inequalities affecting LGBT individuals.

Suggestions for improving LGBT-inclusive mental health services were also shared, and included using preferred pronouns, being aware of minority stress, and involving LGBT individuals in service design and delivery.

Empowering Champions

Champions feel they have been empowered to challenge stigma and discrimination within community settings (See Me Outcome 3)

Champion's increasing confidence, knowledge and skills has enabled them to open up more conversations about mental health stigma and discrimination, and empowered them to design and lead a broad range of creative projects to challenge stigma and discrimination within the LGBT community and beyond.

As just one example, during their time on the project one Champion: created a range of resources such as a zine about mindfulness, developed events including spoken word poetry nights, attended public events to talk about the work of See Me Proud and hosted café spaces where people could come along and chat about their own mental health. Reflecting on the most valuable aspect of their experience as a champion, they mentioned their involvement with the community, and feeling more confident engaging with others on the topic of mental health. They felt that they are now confident bringing their knowledge of anti-stigma practices into the groups they are part of, reflecting that:

"There is a great need in the LGBT Community for raising awareness about mental health stigma, and I have been bringing the conversation to the groups I am a part of."

SMP Champion

Another Champion spoke about how one of their creative anti-stigma projects was picked up by influential organisations that were able to share their work with more people, whilst another spoke of the satisfaction of seeing a resource they worked on applied successfully in schools.

"I've loved the people that I've been able to meet, but it's the end results that are the best part... Being able to see people actually listen and make some changes, knowing I can send my eldest to school and they're not going to feel like they're not getting to be who they are, and the teachers embracing that is fantastic."

SMP Champion

"Being a Community Champion isn't just about hosting a stall or handing out leaflets, it's about being present in your community, wherever that may be and allowing people a safe space to share their stories"

Annual report 2020-21

"I enjoy being on the stalls. I feel like I'm productive and making a difference. It's built up my own confidence as well as wanting to help others."

SMP Champion

[What are you most proud of in your work with See Me Proud?]

"Probably the Out Zine. I worked with one of the youth champions at See Me, and sent it to Time and Space who were really pleased with the zine, and want to share it with people online." SMP Champion

A Champion's reflections

Since becoming a SMP volunteer, I have participated in a range of training sessions with See Me Scotland and LGBT Health & Wellbeing – these have prepared me for my role of creating ways to engage with target communities and help to tackle stigma and discrimination. There is a great need in the LGBTQ+ Community for raising awareness about mental health stigma, and I have been bringing the conversation to the groups I am a part of.

With the help of a friend, I created a zine on Mindfulness – the practice of mindfulness can raise participants wellbeing and resilience -we printed 50 copies and distributed the zine to target communities, especially to those new to the practice or those wanting to reintroduce this wellbeing tool into their everyday life.

Supported by See Me in Scotland, Time to Talk Day aims to help folk to engage in conversations around mental health. I held an Open Mic in a community café in Govanhill, southside Glasgow and several folk gave performances of spoken word and music – many addressed the topic of mental health from a position of lived experience – this Open Mic also helped signpost folks to the activities of See Me Scotland and LGBT Health & Wellbeing – there was the opportunity for folk attending to engage in 1 to 1 conversations – the event was well received, and folk were keen to repeat the experience.

“The SMP training gave me much more awareness of the impacts of self-stigma, and allowed me to realise that experiences I have had in the past had been cases of indirect discrimination. It made me more aware of this, as I previously believed I hadn't experienced much discrimination.”

As someone with lived experience of Bipolar disorder, to celebrate World Bipolar Day (30 March), I held an informal drop-in in another café in Govanhill. There were fruitful conversations around mental health in general and continuing stigma and discrimination experienced by attendees – one interesting outcome was a conversation around attitudes to physical disabilities – this highlighted the common denominator of the need to tackle discrimination in today's society. Again, using evaluation forms, folk felt the event was worthwhile and informative.

As someone with lived experience of stigma and discrimination around my mental health and sexual orientation (I am a gay woman who struggled with 'coming out', starting this journey visibly only in my mid-30s), I aim in general to raise awareness by

everyday conversations, believing there is the need to always 'educate' the larger population in society. There is a pressing need to preserve the human rights of minority communities – this is true more than ever with the current trend of governments and the folk they represent, moving to the political right - hard won rights can no longer be taken for granted – it is our duty to safeguard these and continue to raise awareness and assert our rightful presence and place in society !

Rose, SMP Champion. Taken from SMP report, 2022 Q4



Personal Influence on Champions

Champions have increased their personal resilience, confidence and self esteem.

Champions spoke of the positive impacts that becoming involved in See Me Proud had had for them personally. They talked about how their confidence had increased through the experiences of taking part in different events, and their self-esteem and resilience was improved through the various formal and informal learning opportunities provided, including training, peer support and creative projects which enabled a process of self-reflection. For example, through her involvement in See Me Proud, one Champion spoke of developing a stronger sense of self in relation to her LGBT identity, and her experiences with mental health.

“It’s made me much more aware of where other people are at in their journey, and the impact that not feeling safe to come out until later in life can have on your mental health.”

SMP Champion

“We’re LGBT community champions. I can be proud of that. It just helps me be proud of who I am as an LGBT person and I think that’s really important” SMP Champion

Another Champion spoke of the impact that it had had on their ability to understand their children’s experiences, and the subsequent impact that had on their children

“I think it’s given me a lot more information, it’s definitely made a difference personally, even just understanding and supporting my kids, understanding myself and having those conversations about stigma.” SMP Champion

Community Champions have gone on to secure new volunteering opportunities and employment as a result of their involvement in See Me Proud. Champions have fed back that the role enabled them to feel more confident and helped them develop the skills they needed to gain new work and volunteering opportunities.

“My work with See Me Proud over the last year has not just helped me get through lockdown but also develop my skills. It’s been great to be part of something during this time and I have felt proud of the way that we have connected and supported with people especially when people have been struggling with their mental health as a result of the pandemic. Think See Me proud has shone a light on how the LGBT community can connect and support each other” SMP Champion



See Me Proud Champion Zy became a board member for LGBT Health and Wellbeing in 2022

Influencing Partners

The See Me Proud project partnership brought together skills and expertise from two well-established organisations to tackle the issue of mental health and wider intersectional stigma within LGBT communities in Scotland. Both project partners provided training, support and resources that enabled the project to thrive. As one development worker on the project reflected,

“The first year has been amazing in terms of the support I’ve had... without that support and guidance I don’t think I would have been as confident to do it justice.”

LGBT Development Worker

The project has left a lasting legacy within See Me and LGBT Health and Wellbeing.

LGBT Health and Wellbeing

“The anti-stigma and discrimination work has been part of our organisation’s delivery for seven years, and so this has been embedded into all other projects, including our counselling service and community project, as well as our targeted programmes (e.g. trans support; asylum seekers; older people).

Our staff have learned new ways of opening up conversations about mental health, and are aware of the barriers some individuals – and communities – may face to being open about their mental health in different settings. We now ensure every 3 months we deliver an information session on talking about mental health on our Asylum Seeker & Refugee Project, which helps these people go on to access our other services, such as 121s, counselling or our helpline.

In our most recent round of recruitment, we selected champions with different areas of expertise, and from different areas. Although this brought diversity and fresh perspectives to the project, it made it more difficult to have a dedicated project team working on one set piece of work, with people preferring to work independently.

Over the 7 years we’ve been fortunate to be able to try different approaches with the Community Champion model, working on how to use people’s lived experience to engage with new and underserved communities, and we’re excited to take this forward into our future work.”

See Me Proud 2023-24 Annual Report

See Me

Since See Me Proud, See Me have continued to support projects to tackle stigma in LGBT+ communities. In 2024, LGBT Youth and See Me collaborated with young people and Queer Film Night to produce video resources. Together, they planned and developed video resource content for three short [videos](#). The videos created were co-produced with young people who wrote the scripts, filmed the content, and provided voiceovers.

Challenges and Learning

Between 2018 and 2024, the See Me Proud project partnership between See Me and LGBT Health & Wellbeing leveraged See Me's expertise in mental health stigma and discrimination and LGBT Health and Wellbeing's expertise in LGBT+ community matters, to tackle mental health stigma within the LGBT+ communities in Scotland.

See Me Proud employed a Community Champions Model to:

- Build a movement to challenge stigma.
- Empower individuals to influence change in community and healthcare settings.
- Connect with See Me's broader social movement, emphasizing intersectionality.

The project experienced several key challenges during the six years that it ran, including a global pandemic and a rapidly changing cultural climate in which stigma and discrimination faced by many groups, including LGBT+ people, has increased. Throughout the project, adaptations were made to mitigate key challenges and ensure maximum impact.

See Me proud learned that it was **essential to build in significant time at the start of the project** to review the existing Champions model of training and tweak it to ensure that it would be both LGBT inclusive and also contextualised the particular issues that the LGBT community are more likely to experience around their mental health. Taking time to connect with the people in the communities that See Me Proud intended to work with, and co-designing material to maximising relevance and impact.

Attending existing community events such as Pride was beneficial as a means of connecting with community members, aligning the key messages and increasing the profile of See Me Proud. A common challenge was around **finding suitable times for training champions** and enabling maximum attendance.

Scheduling training times that accommodate all champions was often tricky. Across the years, November and December seemed to be particularly



See Me Proud at Glasgow Pride, 2018

challenging times for engagement (with champions often very busy in the run up to the festive period, and the prevalence of seasonal illnesses) so in later years project plans were adjusted to put less pressure on engagement in these months.

Additionally, to mitigate the risks of high levels of disengagement, development officers found that it was helpful to find dates and times for training as far in advance as possible. In some years, the engagement from champions as a whole group was lower than anticipated. Some individual champions however would remain active and dedicate extensive time to the project throughout.

Challenges and Learning (ctd.)

At the end of 2024, See Me Proud had intended to deliver a large showcase event to celebrate the partnership from 2017-2024, however due to staff capacity, funding resources, and lower than expected champion engagement this was adjusted to a presentation, a visual timeline of project milestones, and a social event to thank champions.

As the project moved into 2023-2024, external challenges were felt due to increasingly negative rhetoric on social media around trans rights and other LGBTQ+ issues, meaning that for many LGBTQ+ people, social media did not feel like a safe or welcoming space. Therefore, initial plans to focus on promoting the values project through social media platforms such as TikTok were scaled back. It was therefore important to be sensitive and responsive to how media discourses can impact the mental health of the community, further demonstrating the importance of close community links and understanding context.

Reflections from See Me

“This project provides an example of delivering See Me Community Champion training through strategic partnerships to achieve greater reach and diversity. To ensure that recruitment and training resources were tailored to reflect the specific needs of LGBT Health and Wellbeing, **application forms were amended to be more LGBT inclusive.**

“Developing a project associated with an already established and recognised community group is an effective way to ensure success. See Me Proud can tap into LGBT Health and Wellbeing’s social media and other resources to raise awareness, promote training and start community conversations. **Having a dedicated worker to provide group and one-to-one support to Champions is valued and helps individuals to sustain engagement.**

“Facilitating the growth of a strong peer support network has helped members to sustain their involvement. While the group proactively kept in contact with one another, having the Development Worker to monitor and coordinate this has been of real benefit. This has resulted in a well-established See Me Proud peer support group that has become self-sustaining. See Me Proud Champions would also welcome networking opportunities with wider See Me volunteers. It was felt that this would support sharing and learning from experiences of See Me volunteers and encourage the continued growth of peer support networks.”

See Me Impact Report (2019)

Conclusions

This report highlights key findings from the summative evaluation of the See Me Proud partnership between See Me and LGBT Health and Wellbeing. The mixed-methods evaluation conducted by the Mental Health Foundation used qualitative thematic analysis of six years of primary and secondary data, including interviews, reports, and focus groups. The report has outlined the key areas of impact for See Me Proud Champions and that the Champions and wider project in turn had across policy, health and social care and LGBT+ communities in Scotland.

Across the lifespan of the project 23 LGBT+ Community Champions were trained. Training was co-developed and delivered to tailor it towards LGBT+ experiences and included facilitation, project planning, media and community development elements.

Evidence gathered for this evaluation demonstrated that Champions developed a deeper understanding of stigma, discrimination, and human rights as a result of their involvement with the project. Peer support from their colleagues, helped Champions deepen their understanding of the intersectional nature of stigma, and to grow in confidence in exploring the topic. Consequently, many felt empowered to speak openly about mental health and challenge stigma in their communities.

See Me Proud Champions volunteered over 1500 hours to the project, developing and delivering a wide variety of community engagement events including Pride stalls, workshops, zine fairs, and open mic nights, as well as intersectional stigma workshops with LGBT+ New Scots. Champions co-designed a wealth of creative and educational resources including zines, toolkits, podcasts, and graphic novels. Social media was used to extend reach, though engagement was affected by rising online hostility toward LGBT+ communities. Champions also engaged with local authorities and influenced policy discussions. Their lived experience added credibility and visibility to anti-stigma advocacy.

As a result of their engagement with See Me Pride, Champions reported increased resilience, self-esteem, and a stronger sense of identity. Many gained new employment or volunteering opportunities as a result of their involvement.

The See Me Proud project successfully empowered LGBT+ individuals to challenge mental health stigma through community-led action, creative expression, and policy engagement. It has contributed significantly to See Me's programme outcomes, and left a lasting legacy within both partner organisations and the wider community.

See Me is managed by SAMH and MHF Scotland, and is funded by Scottish Government.



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