

# always be heard'

work over the years, so much work for Aids and they were fantastic.

"I think they thought that Stonewall coming along was going to suck up all the work that they had done and not acknowledge them or cooperate moving forward. There was a lot of friction. But in the end, everyone became best friends.

"In a way, they were right. There was a lot of elitism around that whole thing. But, it worked."

Section 28 was revoked in England in 2003.

During those early years, London felt like a liberating place for an out lesbian woman, she said.

"At every protest you'd meet fellow lesbians. At

night you just went out. There was the dreaded lesbian club Gateways, off the King's Road, which was really sleazy. You went down a dank stairwell and this woman called Smithy used to open it up and see if she'd let you in. Hampstead's Women's Pond was a great place to meet lesbians on a Sunday morning."

Today, Ms Cunningham-Reid is making a film about artists Heather Astroyd and Dan Harvey.

She lives with her partner and their two dogs, swims in the ponds every morning and is always pleased to see the many gay couples kissing happily on the Heath.



Fiona Cunningham-Reid and her dog, Coco

## Message from our sponsors

### Promoting, acceptance and inclusion

One topic I often discuss with people, especially during cold weather like this, is homelessness. The harsh reality of living on the streets becomes more evident when you encounter someone sitting on the cold ground while feeling the freezing air biting at you. What many people may not realize, however, is that a significant portion of those on the streets are there due to the challenges they face related to their identity or sexuality.

It's essential to recognize that LGBTQ+ issues are often linked to economic factors. Many of us experience higher rates of poverty and encounter barriers in the job market.

These challenges, along with social and familial exclusion, are reflected in the statistics. LGBTQ+ individuals comprise nearly a quarter of all youth homelessness—a figure likely underestimated.

Moreover, even when LGBTQ+ individuals find temporary shelter, they often encounter discrimination and harassment within the system itself. Many feel compelled to conceal their true selves out of fear for their safety, intensifying feelings of isolation. This lack of acceptance perpetuates the cycle of homelessness, making it even harder for individuals to access the support and resources they desperately need.

The Albert Kennedy Trust (AKT) conducted a report on LGBTQ+ youth homelessness, uncovering crucial findings. At the local level, efforts should focus on ensuring robust data collection and directing individuals to available services. Without knowing who's utilizing facilities, identifying gaps becomes challenging, and individuals may miss out on critical support.

Nationally, the issues are more pronounced. The Conservative government seems only interested in LGBTQ+ issues when it comes to sparking a culture war, which divides communities at a time when support is needed most. The government must commit to addressing homelessness experienced by all LGBTQ+ individuals and refrain from divisive tactics.

To address the challenges faced by these young people, we must tackle the root causes of LGBTQ+ homelessness by promoting acceptance and inclusion within families, schools, and communities. This involves providing resources and support to parents and caregivers to better understand and affirm their LGBTQ+ children.

It also entails implementing anti-bullying policies in schools and workplaces to ensure LGBTQ+ individuals can live and thrive without fear of harassment or discrimination.

To take a step back I think it's also important to look at ourselves. Part of the responsibility falls on us—the conversations we have in our communities, how we respond to hate, and the kindness we show to those we encounter every day.

Let us also not forget, during the pandemic, the "Everyone In" campaign swiftly housed all rough sleepers. A testament to the power we have at our disposal, a power we should be using to transform the lives of those facing the harshest battles in our nation.



Cllr Scott Emery  
Liberal Democrat Highgate Councillor and Parliamentary Candidate for Hampstead and Highgate

# Support for chemsex users

PARAMEDICS treat one person a day from the effects of chemsex, and campaigners have called for greater awareness about this "secretive" world that impacts the LGBTQ+ community.

Chemsex involves taking drugs – usually GHB (or G), mephedrone (known as M-kat) and crystal meth – that boost sex drive and feelings of euphoria.

The drugs cocktail is often used by gay men at sex parties.

Co-founder of support service Controlling Chemsex, which is based near Regent's Park, Ignacio Labayen de Inza said: "These drugs make people feel very confident and sexy in a world where there are very high standards regarding how you should look.

"The gay community is very vulnerable to that because sex is very available and we sometimes use sex to deal with boredom and it's a way to connect with other people. It's very complex."

Mr de Inza said shame stops people from seeking help from traditional support services, which are primarily geared towards helping people to stop using, which doesn't involve sex.

He said: "When we talk about drug and alcohol problems, we are talking about substances. When we talk about chemsex we are talking about substances but we are also talking about something as powerful as sex."

The former Bloomsbury



Ignacio Labayen de Inza

resident added that the situation "is getting worse and worse". At his charity, which offers free online counselling, people as young as 18 are presenting with chemsex dependencies, saying they were first offered free chems from older men. From January 2021 to May 2023, the London Ambulance Service treated 764 people from intoxication from substances associated with chemsex.

Mr de Inza said: "Lockdown was a turning point. More people started using on their own because they were feeling bored and lonely. Zoom calls where people can have phone sex with 200 people became very popular during lockdown.

"Some people only do chems on

their own while watching porn for sometimes over six hours."

Chemsex users can jump from sex party to sex party, which are advertised on WhatsApp groups and Grindr, a dating app for gay men, which drug dealers also use for business.

He said: "If you live in Camden Town and you go on Grindr tonight at two in the morning you will find sex parties happening in the area. I remember going to many houses in Camden and Islington when I was using chems 10 years ago."

Mr de Inza developed a dependency to G, which is a physically addictive clear liquid, after he used it to cope with his comedowns from crystal meth. "I was smoking meth practically

every day. I was injecting at least once or twice a week. I was taking G all the time. It was horrible," he said. "It's very, very easy to overdose on G. And overdosing is a big problem because it's very normalised and people don't often call an ambulance," he said. It's become normal to see someone "G-ing out" and fall unconscious for a few hours at a party.

He believes reconnecting with people, your emotions and enjoying sober sex again is the main way to get over a chemsex addiction.

Peter Kingsley, LAS Advanced Paramedic, said: "Chemsex is a secret world. The people we care for following a chemsex incident often lead very conventional lives outside of these meet-ups and don't disclose their engagement in chemsex to anyone, including their GPs. This risks their health conditions going untreated and physical and mental health deteriorating."

As part of an initiative to reduce harm, paramedics now give out cards with educational resources and information about helpful organisations to people they treat.

Local chemsex support services include Change Grow Live in Camden Town, London Friend in Caledonian Road and the NHS's Mortimer Market Centre in Fitzrovia.

FRANKIE LISTER-FELL